Weird Tales

MAY. 1932

The Unique Magazine

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A Goose-flesh Vampire Story

by Hugh B. Cave

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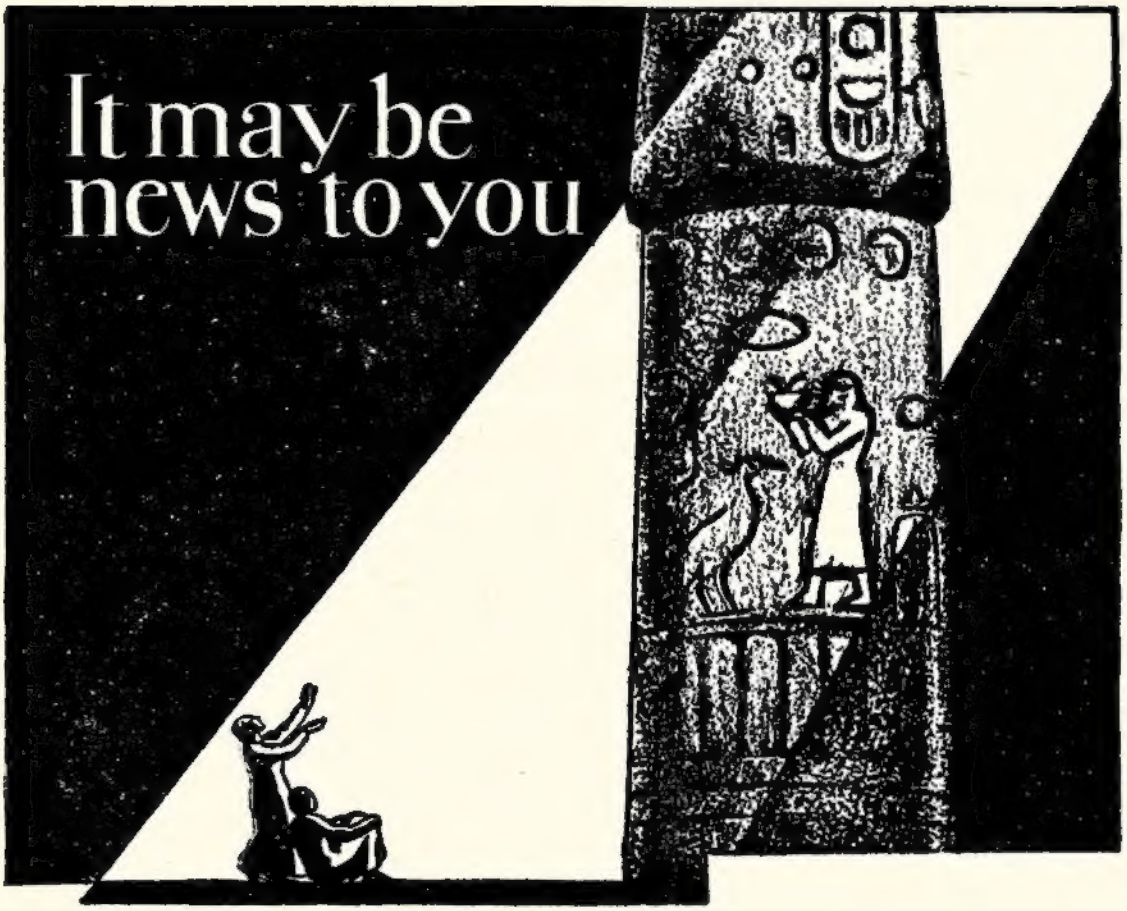

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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IN THIS issue begins a reprint novel, *Frankenstein,* by Mary Shelley, which for more than one hundred years has been acclaimed as a masterpiece of weird horror. The installments, except for the opening one in this issue, will not be long. But we wish to find out whether you, the readers of this magazine, really want us to publish serials in our Weird Story Reprint department. *The Wolf-Leader,* by Alexandre Dumas, which ended in our March issue, was very popular with our readers, as shown by the flood of commendatory letters that you sent in to us about that striking werewolf novel. But we want you to feel that this magazine belongs to you; and for that reason we ask again the questions that were asked in the April Eyrie, which is not yet on the stands as this issue goes to press. Do you want us to go ahead and offer *Dracula* and other weird novels to you in our reprint department after *Frankenstein* is concluded? Or do you want us to confine our reprints to short stories? Or shall we print in that department only stories that have appeared in earlier issues of WEIRD TALES? Or shall we discontinue reprints entirely? We put the matter in your hands, and will do whatever you wish us to do.

The House of the Living Dead, by Harold Ward, has called forth enthusiastic letters from those of you who want your weird tales extremely weird, even though that story does not come first in popularity among the stories in the March issue.

Writes Jack Darrow, of Chicago: "*The House of the Living Dead* is a weird tale what is a weird tale. 'Living corpses! Men and women, filched from the grave, festering in their moldering cerements;'—'and feel the maggots bore their tortuous way through my decaying carcass.' Mr. Editor, when I read such a story, I know that my interest in the weird tale is *not* declining. I only wish that you could publish more stories as weird as *The House of the Living Dead* and *The Space-Eaters.* I like my weird stories to be so creepy and weird that I jump at any little sound and look over my shoulder expecting to find some slithering monster ready to pounce upon me."

Gertrude Hemken, of Chicago, writes to the Eyrie: "*The Vengeance of Ixmal* is marvelous and entirely different from the usual vampire stories. I've always greeted stories about Old Mexico and the Aztecs with a cheer. They hold a fascination for me that no other country and time does."

"It has been well worth while waiting for a story by Seabury Quinn when he gives us this thrilling novel of *The Devil's Bride,*" writes Mrs. T. Portelli, of De-

(Please turn to page 582)

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(Continued from page 580)

troit. "Methinks I would not care to live in Harrisonville, though it would furnish excitement galore."

A letter from Ralph Bennitt, of Saunemin, Illinois, says: "I think one of the best features of your stories is their wide scope in the unusual. One tires of a diet of all scientific, all ghost, or all vampire type, and I think you are right in giving your readers some of each."

Wilfred B. Talman writes from New York: "Permit me to congratulate you on what I think are the highest quality shorts you have run in any issue of WEIRD TALES I have seen. My vote goes to *The Thing in the Cellar*, by David H. Keller. *The Devil's Bride* is great, and would get my vote if it weren't for the splendid indirectness of the 'cellar' story. *The Devil's Bride* gathered considerable momentum in the current issue that it didn't have in the first installment."

Writes Charles Newman, of Chicago: "Of all the stories you have published for several months, *The House of the Living Dead* strikes me as the best. Naturally, as a constant reader, I think all of your yarns are good, but that one especially appealed to me as being utterly different."

"How about a sequel to *Placide's Wife?*" asks Mrs. Frank Kaye, Jr., of Atlanta, Georgia. To which we answer that another story by Kirk Mashburn, *The Last of Placide's Wife*, is already in our hands and will appear in the near future.

Donald Jones, of Chickasaw, Alabama, writes to the Eyrie: "I agree with the fans who want to keep the magazine weird, but I also would like some more of Edmond Hamilton's interstellar patrol stories. Keep up the vampire stories, and give us more of Robert E. Howard's stories about King Kull."

"Why don't you run short biographies of the authors?" inquires Fred E. Ebel, of Milwaukee. "Hundreds, like myself, must be anxious to know about Quinn and others."

Paul S. Smith, of Orange, New Jersey, writes to the Eyrie: "There is not a story in the March issue which deserves anything but praise. You show fine judgment and discernment in selecting your material. *Island of Doom*, by Bassett Morgan, has an excellent plot. I found this tale quite enthralling from start to finish. Many stories dealing with the subjects of brain transplantation and carnivorous plants have been written; but I have never read one of this general type which showed greater originality or was more entertaining or impressive than *Island of Doom*."

A letter from Grace Penfield, of Toppenish, Washington, says: "Once again I am forced to write you by the enthusiasm born in me for your magazine and its authors. The story urging me to give thanks to its writer for such good entertainment, I find is one written by a favorite author of mine: *The Monster of the Prophecy* by Clark Ashton Smith. I enjoyed this story a great deal. There was such an interesting plot, such a wealth of detail and as always in this author's stories such smooth-flowing words tending to make the reader forget it is story matter, and not a true happening. For myself I was Alvor as I read, experiencing the strange drama of his life thoroughly. Another author whose imaginative fiction thrills me and leaves me anxious for the next issue is Otis Adelbert Kline. His *Tam, Son of the Tiger*, was splendid, and not only interest-

(Please turn to page 718)

Learn WHY YOU STAMMER

— and how readily others secure relief

This 279-page Book Tells —Here is a book worth its weight in gold to you if you stammer, stutter or have any speech trouble. It is a book fairly overflowing with the real, definite, tangible, hard-to-get facts about stammering. It is packed with priceless pointers that have never before appeared in print—tells dozens of things you have long wanted to know—tears away the veil of doubt, mystery and guesswork and reveals the plain truth about speech and its defects.

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- —Why some cases cannot be corrected?
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"That night, as she stood before me, I tore the crucifix from my throat."

The Brotherhood of Blood

By HUGH B. CAVE

A sensational story of the Undead—a beautiful vampire doomed to prey upon the living

IT IS midnight as I write this. Listen! Even now the doleful chimes of the Old North Church, buried in the heart of this enormous city of mine, are tolling the funereal hour.

In a little while, when the city thinks itself immune in sleep, deep-cradled in the somber hours of night—I shall go forth from here on my horrible mission of blood.

Every night it is the same. Every night the same ghoulish orgy. Every night the same mad thirst. And in a little while——

But first, while there is yet time, let me tell you of my agony. Then you will understand, and sympathize, and suffer with me.

I was twenty-six years old then. God alone knows how old I am now. The years frighten me, and I have deliberately forgotten them. But I was twenty-six when she came.

They call me an author. Perhaps I was; and yet the words which I gave to the world were not, and could not be, the true thoughts which hovered in my mind. I had studied—studied things which the average man dares not even to consider. The occult—life after death—spiritualism—call it what you will.

I had written about such things, but in guarded phrases, calculated to divulge only those elementary truths which laymen should be told. My name was well known, perhaps too well known. I can see it now as it used to appear in the pages of the leading medical journals and

magazines devoted to psychic investigation.

"By—Paul Munn—Authority on the Supernatural."

In those days I had few friends; none, in fact, who were in harmony with my work. One man I did know well—a medical student at H——— University, in Cambridge. His name was Rojer Threng.

I can remember him now as he used to sit bolt upright in the huge chair in my lonely Back Bay apartment. He filled the chair with his enormous, loosely-constructed frame. His face was angular, pointed to gaunt extremes. His eyes—ah, you will have cause to consider those eyes before I have finished!—his eyes were eternally afire with a peculiar glittering life which I could never fully comprehend.

"And you can honestly sit there, spilling your mad theories to the world?" he used to accuse me in his rasping, deep-throated voice. "Good Lord, Munn, this is the Twentieth Century—a scientific era of careful thought—not the time of werewolves and vampires! You are mad!"

And yet, for all his open condemnation, he did not dare to stand erect, with his face lifted, and *deny* the things I told him. That sinister gleam of his eyes; there was no denying the thoughts lurking behind it. On the surface he was a sneering, indifferent doubter; but beneath the surface, where no man's eyes penetrated, he *knew*.

He was there in my apartment when she came. That night is vivid even now. There we sat, enveloped in a haze of gray cigarette smoke. I was bent over the desk in the corner, hammering a typewriter. He lay sprawled in the great overstuffed chair, watching me critically, intently, as if he would have liked to continue the heated argument which had passed between us during the past hour.

He had come in his usual unannounced manner, bringing with him an ancient newspaper clipping from some forgotten file in the university. Thrusting the thing into my hand, he had ordered me to read it.

That clipping was of singular interest. It was a half-hearted account of the infamous vampire horror of the little half-buried village of West Surrey. You recall it? It was known, luridly, as the "crime of eleven terrors." Eleven pitiful victims, each with the same significant blood-marks, were one after the other the prey of the unknown vampire who haunted that little village in the heart of an English moor. And then, when the eleventh victim had succumbed, Scotland Yard—with the assistance of the famous psychic investigator, Sir Edmund Friel—discovered the vampire to be the same aged, seemingly innocent old woman who had acted as *attendant nurse* to the unfortunate victims. A ghastly affair.

But Threng held the newspaper clipping up to me as a mere "trick" of journalism. He denounced it bitterly.

"What *is* a vampire, Munn?" he sneered.

I did not answer him. I saw no use in continuing a futile debate on a subject in which we had nothing in common.

"Well?" he insisted.

I swung around, facing him deliberately.

"A vampire," I said thoughtfully, choosing my words with extreme care, "is a creature of living death, dependent upon human blood for its existence. From sunset to sunrise, during the hours of darkness, it is free to pursue its horrible blood-quest. During the day it must remain within the confines of its grave—dead, and yet alive."

"And how does it appear?" he bantered. "As the usual skeletonic intruder, cowled in black, or perhaps as a mystic wraith without substance?"

"In either of two forms," I said coldly, angered by his twisted smile. "As a bat—or in its natural human substance. In either shape it leaves the grave each night and seeks blood. It obtains its blood from the throats of its victims, leaving two significant wounds in the neck from which it has drawn life. Its victims, after such a death, inherit the powers of their persecutor—and become vampires."

"Rot!" Threng exclaimed. "Utter sentimentality and imagination."

I turned back to my typewriter, ignoring him. His words were not pleasant. I would have been glad to be rid of him.

But he was persistent. He leaned forward in his chair and said critically:

"Suppose I wished to become a vampire, Munn. How could I go about it? How *does* a man obtain life after death, or life *in* death?"

"By study," I answered crisply. "By delving into thoughts which men like you sneer at. By going so deeply into such things that he becomes possessed of inhuman powers."

That ended our discussion. He could not conceive of such possibilities; and he laughed aloud at my statement. Bitterly resentful, I forced myself to continue the work before me. He, in turn, thrust a cigarette into his mouth and leaned back in his chair like a great lazy animal. And then—*she* came.

THE soft knock on the door panel—so suggestive that it seemed from the world beyond—startled me. I swung about, frowning at the intrusion. Visitors at this hour of night were not the kind of guests I wished to face.

I went to the door slowly, hesitantly. My hand touched the latch nervously. Then I forced back the foolish fear that gripped me, and drew the barrier wide. And there I saw her for the first time—tall, slender, radiantly lovely as she stood in the half-light of the outer passage.

"You—are Mr. Paul Munn?" she inquired quietly.

"I am," I admitted.

"I am Margot Vernee. It is unconventional, I suppose, calling upon you at this hour; but I have come because of your reputation. You are the one man in this great city who may be able to—help me."

I would have answered her, but she caught sight, then, of Rojer Threng. Her face whitened. She stepped back very abruptly, fearful—or at least so I thought—that he might have overheard her.

"I—I am sorry," she said quickly. "I thought that you were alone, Mr. Munn. I—may I return later? Tomorrow, perhaps—when you are not occupied?"

I nodded. At that particular moment I could not find a voice to answer her; for she had inadvertently stepped directly beneath the bracket lamp in the wall, and her utter beauty fascinated me, choking the words back into my throat.

Then she went; and as I closed the door reluctantly, Rojer Threng glanced quizzically into my face and said dryly:

"Wants you to help her, eh? I didn't know you went in for that sort of thing, Munn. Better be careful!"

And he laughed. God, how I remember that laugh—and the cruel, derisive hatred that was inherent in it! But I did not answer him. In fact, his words were driven mechanically into my mind, and I hardly heard them. Returning to the typewriter, I attempted to force myself once more into the work that confronted me; but the face of that girl blurred the

lines of my manuscript. She seemed to be still in the room, still standing near me. Imagination, of course; and yet, in view of what has happened since that night, I do not know.

SHE did not return as she had promised. All during the following day I awaited her coming—restless, nervous, unable to work. At eleven in the evening I was still pacing automatically back and forth across the floor when the door-bell rang. It was Rojer Threng who stepped over the threshold.

At first he did not mention the peculiar affair of the previous night. He took his customary place in the big chair and talked idly about medical topics of casual interest. Then, bending forward suddenly, he demanded:

"Did she return, Munn?"

"No," I said.

"I thought not," he muttered harshly. "Not after she saw me here. I—used to know her."

It was not so much the thing he said, as the complete bitterness with which he spoke, that brought me about with a jerk, confronting him.

"You—knew her?" I said slowly.

"I knew her," he scowled. "Think of the name, man. Margot Vernee. Have I never mentioned it to you?"

"No." And then I knew that he had. At least, the inflection of it was vaguely familiar.

"Her story would interest you," he shrugged. "Peculiar, Munn—very peculiar, in view of what you were telling me last night, before she came."

He looked up at me oddly. I did not realize the significance of that crafty look then, but now I know.

"The Vernee family," he said, "is as old as France."

"Yes?" I tried to mask my eagerness.

"The Château Vernee is still standing—abandoned—forty miles south of Paris. A hundred years before the Revolution it was occupied by Armand Vernee, noted for his occult research and communications with the spirit world. He was dragged from the château by the peasants of the surrounding district when he was twenty-eight years old and burned at the stake—for witchcraft."

I stared straight into Threng's angular face. If ever I noticed that unholy gleam in his strange eyes, it was at that moment. His eyes were wide open, staring, burning with a dead, phosphorescent glow. Never once did they flicker as he continued his story in that sibilant, half-hissing voice of his.

"After Armand Vernee's execution, his daughter Regine lived alone in the château. She married a young count, gave birth to a son. In her twenty-eighth year she was prostrated with a strange disease. The best physicians in the country could not cure her. She——"

"What—kind of disease?" I said very slowly.

"The symptoms," he said, sucking in his breath audibly, "baffled all those who examined her. Two small red marks at the throat, Munn—and a continual loss of blood *while she slept*. She confessed to horrible dreams. She told of a great bat which possessed her father's face, clawing at the window of her chamber every night—gaining admittance by forcing the shutters open with its claws—hovering over her."

"And—she died?"

"She died. In her twenty-eighth year."

"And then?" I shuddered.

"Her son, François Vernee Leroux, lived alone in the château. The count would not remain. The horror of her

death drove him away—drove him mad. The son, François, lived—alone."

Threng looked steadily at me. At least, his *eyes* looked. The rest of his face was contorted with passion, malignant.

"François Vernee died when he was twenty-eight years of age," he said meaningly. "He, too, left a son—and *that* son died at the age of twenty-eight. Each death was the same. The same crimson marks at the throat. The same loss of blood. The same—madness."

Threng reached for a cigarette and held a match triumphantly to the end of it. His face, behind the sudden glare of that stick of wood, was horrible with exultation.

"Margot Vernee is the last of her line," he shrugged. "Every direct descendant of Armand Vernee has died in the same ghastly way, at twenty-eight years of age. *That* is why the girl came here for help, Munn. She knows the inevitable end that awaits her! She knows that she can not escape the judgment which Armand Vernee has inflicted upon the family of Vernee!"

ROJER THRENG was right. Three weeks after those significant words had passed his lips, the girl came to my apartment. She repeated, almost word for word, the very fundamental facts that Threng had disclosed to me. Other things she told me, too—but I see no need to repeat them here.

"You are the only man who knows the significance of my fate," she said to me; and her face was ghastly white as she said it. "Is there no way to avert it, Mr. Munn? Is there no alternative?"

I talked with her for an eternity. The following night, and every night for the next four weeks, she came to me. During the hours of daylight I delved frantically into research work, in an attempt to find an outlet from the dilemma which faced her. At night, alone with her, I learned bit by bit the details of her mad story, and listened to her pleas for assistance.

Then came that fatal night. She sat close to me, talking in her habitually soft, persuasive voice.

"I have formed a plan," I said quietly.

"A plan, Paul?"

"When the time comes, I shall prepare a sleeping-chamber for you with but one window. I shall seal that window with the mark of the cross. It is the only way."

She looked at me for a long while without speaking. Then she said, very slowly:

"You had better prepare the room, Paul—soon."

"You mean——" I said suddenly. But I knew what she meant.

"I shall be twenty-eight tonight—at midnight."

GOD forgive me that I did not keep her with me that night! I was already half in love with her. No—do not smile at that. You, too, after looking into her face continually for four long weeks—sitting close to her—listening to the soft whisper of her voice—you, too, would have loved her. I would have given my work, my reputation, my very life for her; and yet I permitted her to walk out of my apartment that night, to the horror that awaited her!

She came to me the next evening. One glance at her and I knew the terrible truth. I need not have asked the question that I did, but it came mechanically from my lips, like a dead voice.

"It—came?"

"Yes," she said quietly. "It came."

She stood before me and untied the scarf from her neck. And there, in the center of her white throat, I saw those infernal marks—two parallel slits of crimson, an eighth of an inch in length, horrible in their evil.

"It was a dream," she said, "and yet I know that it was no dream, but vivid reality. A gigantic bat with a woman's face—my mother's face—appeared suddenly at the window of my room. Its claws lifted the window. It circled over my bed as I lay there, staring at it in mute horror. Then it descended upon me, and I felt warm lips on my neck. A languid, wonderfully contented feeling came over me. I relaxed—and slept."

"And—when you awoke?" I said heavily.

"The mark of the vampire was here on my throat."

I stared at her for a very long time, without speaking. She did not move. She stood there by my desk; and a pitiful, yearning look came into her deep eyes.

Then, of a sudden, I was gripped with the helplessness of the whole evil affair. I stormed about the room, screaming my curses to the walls, my face livid with hopeless rage, my hands clawing at anything within reach of them. I tore at my face. I seized the wooden smoking-stand and broke it in my fingers, hurling the shattered pieces into a grinning, maddening picture of the Creator which hung beside the door. Then I tripped, fell, sprawled headlong—and groped again to my feet, quivering as if some tropic fever had laid its cold hands upon me.

There were tears in Margot's eyes as she came toward me and placed her hands on my arm. She would have spoken, to comfort me. I crushed her against me, holding her until she cried out in pain.

"Merciful Christ!" I cried. And the same words spurted from my lips, over and over again, until the room echoed with the intensity of them.

"You—love me, Paul?" she said softly.

"Love you!" I said hoarsely. "*Love* you! God, Margot—is there no way——"

"I love you, too," she whispered wearily. "But it is too late, Paul. The thing has visited me. I am a part of it. I——"

"I can keep you away from it!" I shouted. "I can hide you—protect you—where the thing will never find you!"

She shook her head, smiling heavily.

"It is too late, Paul."

"It is never too late!"

God! The words sounded brave enough then. Since then I have learned better. The creature that was preying on her possessed the infernal powers of life-in-death—powers which no mortal could deny. I knew it well enough, even when I made that rash promise. I had studied those things long enough to know my own limitations against them.

And yet I made the attempt. Before I left her that night, I hung the sign of the cross about her lovely throat, over the crimson stain of the vampire. I locked and sealed the windows of my apartment, breathing a prayer of supplication at each barrier as I made it secure. And then, holding her in my arms for a single unforgettable moment, I left her.

The apartment above mine was occupied by a singular fellow who had more than once called upon me to discuss my work. He, too, was a writer of sorts, and we had a meager something in common because of that. Therefore, when I climbed the stairs at a quarter to twelve that night and requested that he allow me to remain with him until morning, he was not unwilling to accede to my

request, though he glanced at me most curiously as I made it.

However, he asked no questions, and I refrained from supplying any casual information to set his curiosity at rest. He would not have understood.

ALL that night I remained awake, listening for signs of disturbance in the rooms below me. But I heard nothing —not so much as a whisper. And when daylight came I descended the stairs with false hope in my heart.

There was no answer to my knock. I waited a moment, thinking that she might be yet asleep; then I rapped again on the panels. Then, when the silence persisted in haunting me, I fumbled frantically in my pockets for my spare key. I was afraid—terribly afraid.

And she was lying there when I stumbled into the room. Like a creature already dead she lay upon the bed, one white arm drooping to the floor. The silken comforter was thrown back. The breast of her gown was torn open. Fresh blood gleamed upon those dread marks in her throat.

I thought that she was dead. A sob choked in my throat as I dropped down beside her, peering into her colorless face. I clutched at her hand, and it was cold—stark cold. And then, unashamed of the tears that coursed down my cheeks, I lay across her still body, kissing her lips—kissing them as if it were the last time that I should ever see them.

She opened her eyes.

Her fingers tightened a little on my hand. She smiled—a pathetic, tired smile.

"It—came," she whispered. "I—knew it would."

I will not dwell longer on the death of the girl I loved. Enough to recount the simple facts.

I brought doctors to her. No less than seven expert physicians attended her and consulted among themselves about her affliction. I told them my fears; but they were men of the world, not in sympathy with what I had to tell them.

"Loss of blood," was their diagnosis—but they looked upon me as a man gone mad when I attempted to *explain* the loss of blood.

There was a transfusion. My own blood went into her veins, to keep her alive. For three nights she lived. Each of those nights I stood guard over her, never closing my eyes while darkness was upon us. And each night the thing came, clawing at the windows, slithering its horrible shape into the room where she lay. I did not know, then, how it gained admittance. Now—God help me—I know all the powers of that unholy clan. Its nocturnal creatures know no limits of space or confinement.

And this thing that preyed upon the girl I loved—I refuse to describe it. You will know *why* I make such a refusal when I have finished.

Twice I fought it, and found myself smothered by a ghastly shape of fog that left me helpless. Once I lay across her limp body with my hands covering her throat to keep the thing away from her—and I was hurled unmercifully to the floor, with an unearthly, long-dead stench of decayed flesh in my nostrils. When I regained consciousness, the wounds in her throat were newly opened, and my own wrists were marked with the ragged stripes of raking claws.

I realized, after that, that I could do nothing. The horror had gone beyond human power of prevention.

The mark of the cross which I had given her—that was worse than useless. I *knew* that it was useless. Had she worn

it on that very first night of all, before the thing had claimed her for its own, it might have protected her. But now that this infernal mark was upon her throat, even the questionable strength of the cross was nullified by its evil powers. There was nothing left—nothing that could be done.

As a last resort I called upon Rojer Threng. He came. He examined her. He turned to me and said in a voice that was pregnant with unutterable malice:

"I can do nothing. If I could, I *would* not."

And so he left me—alone with the girl who lay there, pale as a ghost, upon the bed.

I knelt beside her. It was eight o'clock in the evening. Dusk was beginning to creep into the room. And she took my hand in hers, drawing me close so that she might speak to me.

"Promise me, Paul——" she whispered.

"Anything," I said.

"In two years you will be twenty-eight," she said wearily. "I shall be forced to return to you. It is not a thing that I can help; it is the curse of my family. I have no descendants—I am the last of my line. You are the one dearest to me. It is *you* to whom I must return. Promise me——"

She drew me very close to her, staring into my face with a look of supplication that made me cold, fearful.

"Promise me—that when I return—you will fight against me," she entreated. "You must wear the sign of the cross—always—Paul. No matter how much I plead with you—to remove it—promise me that you will not!"

"I would rather join you, even in such a condition," I said bitterly, "than remain here alone without you."

"No, Paul. Forget me. Promise!"

"I—promise."

"And you will wear the cross always, and never remove it?"

"I will—fight against you," I said sadly.

Then I lost control. I flung myself beside her and embraced her. For hours we lay there together in utter silence.

She died—in my arms.

It is hard to find words for the rest of this. It was hard, then, to find any reason for living. I did no work for months on end. The typewriter remained impassive upon its desk, forgotten, dusty, mocking me night after night as I paced the floor of my room.

In time I began to receive letters from editors, from prominent medical men, demanding to know why my articles had so suddenly ceased to appear in current periodicals. What could I say to them? Could I explain to them that when I sat down at the typewriter, *her* face held my fingers stiff? No; they would not have understood; they would have dubbed me a rank sentimentalist. I could not reply to their requests. I could only read their letters over and over again, in desperation, and hurl the missives to the floor, as a symbol of my defeat.

I wanted to talk. God, how I wanted to! But I had no one to listen to me. Casual acquaintances I did not dare take into my confidence. Rojer Threng did not return. Even the fellow in the rooms above me, who shared his apartment with me that night, did not come near me. He sensed that something peculiar, something beyond his scope of reason, enveloped me.

Six months passed and I began, slowly at first, to return to my regular routine. That first return to work was agony.

More than one thesis I started in the proper editorial manner, only to find myself, after the first half-dozen pages, writing about *her—her* words, *her* thoughts. More than once I wrenched pages from the roll of the typewriter, ripped them to shreds and dashed them to the floor—only to gather them together again and read them a hundred times more, because they spoke of her.

And so a year passed. A year of my allotted time of loneliness, before she should return.

Three months more, and I was offered an instructorship at the university, to lecture on philosophy. I accepted the position. There I learned that Rojer Threng had graduated from the medical school, had hung out his private shingle, and was well along the road to medical fame. Once, by sheer accident, I encountered him in the corridors of the university. He shook my hand, spoke to me for a few minutes regarding his success, and excused himself at the first opportunity. He did not mention *her*.

Then, months later, came the night of my twenty-eighth birthday.

That night I did a strange thing. When darkness had crept into my room, I drew the great chair close to one of the windows, flung the aperture open wide, and waited. Waited—and *hoped*. I *wanted* her to come.

Yet I remembered my promise to her. Even as I lowered myself into the chair, I hung a crucifix about my throat and made the sign of the cross. Then I sat stiff, rigid, staring into the black void before me.

The hours dragged. My body became stiff, sore from lack of motion. My eyes were glued open, rimmed with black circles of anxiety. My hands clutched the arms of the chair, and never relaxed their intense grip.

I heard the distant bell of the Old North Church tolling eleven o'clock; and later—hours and hours and hours later—it struck a single note to indicate the half-hour before midnight.

Then, very suddenly, a black, bat-like shape was fluttering in the open window. It had substance, for I heard the dead impact of its great wings as they struck the ledge in front of me; and yet it had *no* substance, for I could discern the definite, unbroken shape of the window frame *through* its massive body! And I sat motionless, transfixed—staring.

The thing swooped past me. I saw it strike the floor—heard it struggling erratically between the legs of the table. Then, in front of my eyes, it dissolved into a creature of mist; and another shape took form. I saw it rise out of the floor—saw it become tall and lithe and slender. And then—then *she* stood before me, radiantly beautiful.

In that moment of amazement I forgot my danger. I lurched up from the chair and took a sudden step toward her. My arms went out. Her arms were already out; and she was standing there waiting for me to take her.

But even as I would have clasped her slender body, she fell away from me, staring in horror at the crucifix that hung from my throat. I stopped short. I spoke to her, calling her by name. But she retreated from me, circling around me until she stood before the open window. Then, with uncanny quickness, she was gone—and a great black-winged bat swirled through the opening into the outer darkness.

For an eternity I stood absolutely still, with my arms still outstretched. Then, with a dry, helpless sob, I turned away.

NEED I repeat what must already be obvious? She returned. Night after night she returned to me, taking

form before me with her lovely, pleading arms outstretched to enfold me. I could not bring myself to believe that this utterly lovely, supplicating figure could wish to do me harm. For that matter, I could not believe that she was dead—that she had ever died. I wanted her. God, how I wanted her! I would have given my life to take her beautiful body once more in my arms and hold her close to me.

But I remembered my promise to her. The crucifix remained about my throat. Never once did she touch it—or touch me. In fact, never once did I see her for more than a single fleeting instant. She took birth before my eyes—stood motionless while I stumbled out of the chair and groped toward her—and then the awful power of the sign of the cross thrust her back. Always the same. One maddening moment—and hours upon hours of abject, empty loneliness that followed.

I did no work. All day, every day, I waited in agony for the hour of her coming. Then one day I sat by myself and thought. I reasoned with myself. I argued my personal desires against the truths which I knew to be insurmountable.

And that night, when she stood before me, I tore the crucifix from my throat and hurled it through the open window. I took her in my arms. I embraced her; and I was glad, wonderfully glad, for the first time in more than two years.

We clung to each other. She, too, was glad. I could see it in her face, in her eyes. Her lips trembled as they pressed mine. They were warm, hot—alive.

I am not sure of all that happened. I do not want to be sure. Even as her slender body quivered in my arms, a slow stupor came over me. It was like sleep, but more—oh, so much more desirous than mere slumber. I moved back—I was forced back—to the great chair. I relaxed. Something warm and soft touched my throat. There was no pain, no agony. Life was drawn out of me.

It was daylight when I awoke. The room was empty. The sunlight streamed through the open window. Something wet and sticky lay upon my throat. I reached up, touched it, and stared at my fingers dispassionately. They were stained with blood.

I did not need to seize upon a mirror. The two telltale marks of the vampire were upon my neck. I knew it.

She came the next night. Again we lay together, deliriously happy. I had no regrets. I felt her lips at my throat . . .

Next morning I lay helpless in the big chair, unable to move. My strength had been drawn from me. I had no power to rise. Far into the day I remained in the same posture. When a knock came at my door, I could not stand up to admit the visitor. I could only turn my head listlessly and murmur: "Come in."

It was the manager of the house who entered. He scuffed toward me half apologetically and stood there, looking down at me.

"I've been 'avin' complaints, sor," he scowled, as if he did not like to deliver his message. "The chap up above yer 'as been kickin' about the noise yer makes down 'ere o' nights. It'll 'ave ter stop, sor. I don't like to be tellin' yer—but the chap says as 'ow 'e's seen yer sittin' all night long in front o' yer winder, with the winder wide open. 'E says 'e 'ears yer talkin' ter some 'un down 'ere late at night, sor."

"I'm—very ill, Mr. Robell," I said weakly. "Will you—call a doctor?"

He blinked at me. Then he must have

seen that significant thing on my throat, for he bent suddenly over me and said harshly:

"My Gawd, sor. You *are* sick!"

He hurried out. Fifteen minutes later he returned with a medical man whom I did not recognize. The fellow examined me, ordered me to bed, spent a long while peering at the mark on my neck, and finally went out—perplexed and scowling. When he came back, in an hour or so, he brought a more experienced physician with him.

They did what they could for me; but they did not understand, nor did I undertake to supply them with information. They could not prevent the inevitable; that I knew. I did not want them to prevent it.

And that night, as I lay alone, *she* came as usual. Ten minutes before the luminous hands of the clock on the table beside me registered eleven o'clock, she came to my bed and leaned over me. She did not leave until daylight was but an hour distant.

The next day was my last; and that day brought a man I had never expected to see again. It brought Rojer Threng!

I can see his face even now, as he paced across the room and stood beside my bed. It was repulsive with hate, masked with terrible triumph. His lips curled over his teeth as he spoke; and his eyes—those boring, glittering, living eyes—drilled their way into my tired brain as he glared into my face.

"You wonder why I have come, Munn?"

"Why——" I replied wearily. I was already close to eternity; and having him there beside me, feeling the hideous dynamic quality of his gaunt body, drew the last tongue of life out of me.

"She has been here, eh?" he grinned evilly.

I did not answer. Even the word *she*, coming from his lips, was profanity.

"I came here to tell you something, Munn," he rasped. "Something that will comfort you on the journey you are about to take. Listen——"

He lowered himself into the great chair and hunched himself close. And I was forced to listen to his savage threat, because I could not lift my hand to silence him.

"I used to love Margot Vernee, Munn," he said. "I loved her as much as you do—but in a different way. She'd have none of me. Do you understand? She would have none of me! She despised me. She *told* me that she despised me! *She!*"

His massive hands clenched and unclenched, as if they would have twisted about my throat. His eyes flamed.

"Then she loved *you! You*—with your thin, common body and hoary brain. She refused me, with all I had to offer her, and accepted you! Now do you know why I've come here?"

"You can do nothing—now," I said heavily. "It is too late. She is beyond your power."

Then he laughed. God, that laugh! It echoed and re-echoed across the room, vibrating with fearful intensity. It lashed into my brain like fire—left me weak and limp upon the bed. And there I lay, staring after him as he strode out of the room.

I never saw Rojer Threng again.

I WONDER if you know the meaning of death? Listen. . . .

They carried me that evening to a strange place. I say *they*, but perhaps I should say *he*, for Rojer Threng was the man who ordered the change of surroundings. As for myself, I was too close to unconsciousness to offer resist-

ance. I know only that I was lifted from my bed by four strong arms, and placed upon a stretcher, and then I was carried out of my apartment to a private car which waited at the curb below.

I bear no malice toward the two subordinates who performed this act. They were doing as they had been told to do. They were pawns of Rojer Threng's evil mind.

They made me as comfortable as possible in the rear section of the car. I heard the gears clash into place; then the leather cushion beneath me jerked abruptly, and the car droned away from the curb.

I could discern my surroundings, and I took mental note of the route we followed, though I do not know that it matters particularly. I remembered crossing the Harvard Bridge above the Charles River, with innumerable twinkling lights showing their reflections in the quiet water below. Then we followed one of the central thoroughfares, through a great square where the noise and harsh glare beat into my mind. And later—a long time later—the car came to a stop in the yards of the university.

Once again I was placed upon a stretcher. Where they took me I do not know; except that we passed through a maze of endless corridors in the heart of one of the university's many buildings. But the end of my journey lay in a small, dimly lighted room on one of the upper floors; and there I was lifted from the stretcher and placed upon a comfortable brocaded divan.

It was dusk then, and my two attendants set about making my comfort more complete. They spooned broth between my lips. They turned the light out of my eyes. They covered my prostrate body with a silken robe of some deep red color.

"Why," I murmured, "have you—brought me here?"

"It is Doctor Threng's order, sir," one of them said quietly.

"But I don't want——"

"Doctor Threng fully understands the nature of your malady, sir," the attendant replied, silencing my protest. "He has prepared this room to protect you."

I studied the room, then. Had he not spoken in such a significant tone, I should probably never have given a thought to the enclosure; but the soft inflection of his words was enough to remove my indifference.

As I have said, it was a small room. That in itself was not peculiar; but when I say that the walls were broken by only *one* window, you too will realize something sinister. The walls were low, forming a perfect square with the divan precisely in the center. No hangings, no pictures or portraits of any kind, adorned the walls themselves; they were utterly bare. I know now that they were *not* bare; but the infernal wires that extended across them were so nearly invisible that my blurred sight did not notice.

One thing I shall never forget. When the attendants left me, after preparing me for the night, one of them said deliberately, as if to console me:

"You will be guarded every moment of this night, sir. The wall facing you has been bored through with a spy-hole. Doctor Threng, in the next room, asked me to inform you that he will remain at the spy-hole all night—and will allow nothing to come near you."

And then they left me alone.

I KNEW that she would come. It was my last night on earth, and I was positive that she would see it through by my side, to give me courage. The strange room would not keep her away. She

would be able to find me, no matter where they secreted me.

I waited, lying limp on the divan with my face toward the window. The window was open. I thought then that the attendants had left it open by mistake; that they had overlooked it. I know now that it was left wide because of Rojer Threng's command.

An hour must have passed after they left me to myself. An hour of despair and emptiness for me. She did not come. I began to doubt—to be afraid. I knew that I should die soon—very soon—and I dreaded to enter the great unknown without her guidance. And so I waited and waited and waited, and never once took my eyes from the window which was my only hope of relief.

Then—it must have been nearly midnight—I heard the doleful howling of a dog, somewhere down in the yard below. I knew what it meant. I struggled up, propping myself on one elbow, staring eagerly.

A moment later the faint square of moonlight which marked the window-frame was suddenly blotted out. I saw a massive, winged shape silhouetted in the opening. For an instant it hovered there, flapping its great body. Then it swooped into the room where I lay.

I saw again that uncanny transformation of spirit. The nocturnal specter dissolved before my eyes and assumed shape again, rising into a tall, languid, divinely beautiful woman. And *she* stood there, smiling at me.

All that night she remained by my side. She talked to me, in a voice that was no more than a faint whisper, comforting me for the ordeal which I must soon undergo. She told me secrets of the grave—secrets which I may not repeat here, nor ever wish to repeat. Ah, but it was a relief from the loneliness and restlessness of my heart to have her there beside me, sitting so quietly, confidently, in the depths of the divan. I no longer dreaded the fate in store for me. It meant that I should be with her always. You who love or ever have loved with an all-consuming tenderness—you will understand.

The hours passed all too quickly. I did not take account of them. I knew that she would leave when it was necessary for her to go. I knew the unfair limits that were imposed upon her very existence. Hers was a life of darkness, from sunset to sunrise. Unless she returned to the secrets of the grave before daylight crept upon us, her life would be consumed.

The hour of parting drew near. I feared to think of it. With her close to me, holding my hand, I was at peace; but I knew that without her I should lapse again into an agony of doubt and fear. If I could have died then, with her near me, I think I should have been contented.

But it was not to be. She bent over to kiss me tenderly, and then rose from the divan.

"I—must go back, beloved," she whispered.

"Stay a moment more," I begged. "One moment——"

"I dare not, Paul."

She turned away. I watched her as if she were taking my very soul with her. She walked very softly, slowly, to the window. I saw her look back at me, and she smiled. God, how I remember that last smile! It was meant to give me courage—to put strength into my heart.

And then she stepped to the window.

Even as she moved that last step, the horrible thing happened. A monstrous, livid streamer of white light seared across the space in front of her. It blazed in her face like a rigid snake, hurling her back. There, engraved upon the wall,

hung the sign of the cross, burning like a thing possessed of life!

She staggered away from it. I saw the terror in her face as she ran to the opposite wall. Ten steps she took; and then that wall too shone livid with the cross. Two horrible wires, transformed into writhing reality by some tremendous charge of electricity, glowed before her.

She sought frantically for a means of escape. Back and forth she turned. The sign of the cross confronted her on every side, hemming her in. There *was* no escape. The room was a veritable trap—a trap designed and executed by the infernally cunning mind of Rojer Threng.

I watched her in mute madness. Back and forth she went, screaming, sobbing her helplessness. I have watched a mouse in a wire cage do the same thing, but this—this was a thousand times more terrible.

I called out to her. I attempted to rise from the divan and go to her; but weakness came over me and I fell back quivering.

She realized then that it was the end. She fought to control herself, and she walked to the divan where I lay, and knelt beside me.

She did not speak. I think she had no voice at that moment. I held her close against me, my lips pressed into her hair. Like a very small, pitiful leaf she trembled in my arms.

And then—even as I held her—the first gleam of dawn slid across the floor of that ghastly room. She raised her head and looked into my face.

"Good-bye—Paul——"

I could not answer her. Something else answered. From the spy-hole in the opposite wall of the room came a hoarse, triumphant cackle—in Rojer Threng's malignant voice.

The girl was dead—dead in my arms. And that uncouth voice from the wall, screaming its derision, brought madness to my heart.

I lunged to my feet, fighting against the torture that drove through my body. I stumbled across the room. I reached the wall—found the spy-hole with my frozen fingers—clawed at it—raged against it——

And there, fighting to reach the man who had condemned me to an eternity of horror—I died.

My story is finished. The chimes of the Old North Church have just tolled a single funereal note to usher in the hour. One o'clock. . . .

It is many, many years since that fateful night when I became a creature of the blood. I do not dare to remember the number of them. Between the hours of sunrise and sunset I cling to the earth of my grave—where I refuse to stay, until I have avenged her. Then I shall write more, perhaps, pleading for your assistance that I may join her in the true death. A spike through the heart will do it. . . .

From sunset until sunrise, throughout the hours of night, I am as one of you. I breathe, I drink; occasionally, as at this moment, I write—so that I may speak her name again and see it before me. I have attended social functions, mingled with people. Only one precaution must I take, and that to avoid mirrors, since my deathless body casts no reflection.

Every night—*every night*—I have visited the great house where Rojer Threng lives. No, I have not yet avenged her. The monster is too cunning, too clever. The sign of the cross is always upon him, to keep me from his throat. But sometime—*sometime*—he will forget. And then—ah, *then!*

When it is done, I shall find a way to quit this horrible brotherhood. I shall die the real death, as she did—and I shall find her.

"He thrust his torch into the mummified face, where shadows moved like living things in the hollows of the eyes."

The Vaults of Yoh-Vombis

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A powerful story of a nightmare horror, a weird vampirism spawned in the caverns of the red planet

IF THE doctors are correct in their prognostication, I have only a few Martian hours of life remaining to me. In those hours I shall endeavor to relate, as a warning to others who might follow in our footsteps, the singular and frightful happenings that terminated our researches among the ruins of Yoh-Vombis. If my story will only serve to prevent future explorations, the telling will not have been in vain.

There were eight of us, professional archeologists with more or less terrene and interplanetary experience, who set

forth with native guides from Ignarh, the commercial metropolis of Mars, to inspect that ancient, eon-deserted city. Allan Octave, our official leader, held his primacy by knowing more about Martian archeology than any other Terrestrial on the planet; and others of the party, such as William Harper and Jonas Halgren, had been associated with him in many of his previous researches. I, Rodney Severn, was more of a newcomer, having spent but a few months on Mars; and the greater part of my own ultra-terrene delvings had been confined to Venus.

The nude, spongy-chested Aihais had spoken deterringly of vast deserts filled with ever-swirling sandstorms, through which we must pass to reach Yoh-Vombis; and in spite of our munificent offers of payment, it had been difficult to secure guides for the journey. Therefore we were surprized as well as pleased when we came to the ruins after seven hours of plodding across the flat, treeless, orange-yellow desolation to the southwest of Ignarh.

We beheld our destination, for the first time, in the setting of the small, remote sun. For a little, we thought that the domeless, three-angled towers and broken-down monoliths were those of some unlegended city, other than the one we sought. But the disposition of the ruins, which lay in a sort of arc for almost the entire extent of a low, gneissic, league-long elevation of bare, eroded stone, together with the type of architecture, soon convinced us that we had found our goal. No other ancient city on Mars had been laid out in that manner; and the strange, many-terraced buttresses, like the stairways of forgotten Anakim, were peculiar to the prehistoric race that had built Yoh-Vombis.

I have seen the hoary, sky-confronting walls of Machu Pichu amid the desolate Andes; and the frozen, giant-builded battlements of Uogam on the glacial tundras of the nightward hemisphere of Venus. But these were as things of yesteryear compared to the walls upon which we gazed. The whole region was far from the life-giving canals beyond whose environs even the more noxious flora and fauna are seldom found; and we had seen no living thing since our departure from Ignarh. But here, in this place of petrified sterility, of eternal bareness and solitude, it seemed that life could never have been.

I think we all received the same impression as we stood staring in silence while the pale, sanies-like sunset fell on the dark and megalithic ruins. I remember gasping a little, in an air that seemed to have been touched by the irrespirable chill of death; and I heard the same sharp, laborious intake of breath from others of our party.

"That place is deader than an Egyptian morgue," observed Harper.

"Certainly it is far more ancient," Octave assented. "According to the most reliable legends, the Yorhis, who built Yoh-Vombis, were wiped out by the present ruling race at least forty thousand years ago."

"There's a story, isn't there," said Harper, "that the last remnant of the Yorhis was destroyed by some unknown agency —something too horrible and outré to be mentioned even in a myth?"

"Of course, I've heard that legend," agreed Octave. "Maybe we'll find evidence among the ruins to prove or disprove it. The Yorhis may have been cleaned out by some terrible epidemic, such as the Yashta pestilence, which was a kind of green mold that ate all the bones of the body, starting with the teeth. But we needn't be afraid of getting it, if there are any mummies in Yoh-Vombis—the bacteria will all be dead as their victims, after so many cycles of planetary dessication."

The sun had gone down with uncanny swiftness, as if it had disappeared through some sort of prestidigitation rather that the normal process of setting. We felt the instant chill of the blue-green twilight; and the ether above us was like a huge, transparent dome of sunless ice, shot with a million bleak sparklings that were the stars. We donned the coats and helmets of Martian fur, which must always be worn at night; and going on to westward of the walls, we established our camp in their lee, so that we might be sheltered a little from the *jaar*, that cruel desert wind that always blows from the east before dawn. Then, lighting the alcohol lamps that had been brought along for cooking purposes, we huddled around them while the evening meal was prepared and eaten.

Afterward, for comfort rather than because of weariness, we retired early to our sleeping-bags; and the two Aihais, our guides, wrapped themselves in the cerement-like folds of *bassa*-cloth which are all the protection their leathery skins appear to require even in sub-zero temperatures.

Even in my thick, double-lined bag, I still felt the rigor of the night air; and I am sure it was this, rather than anything else, which kept me awake for a long while and rendered my eventual slumber somewhat restless and broken. At any rate, I was not troubled by even the least presentiment of alarm or danger; and I should have laughed at the idea that anything of peril could lurk in Yoh-Vombis, amid whose undreamable and stupefying antiquities the very phantoms of its dead must long since have faded into nothingness.

I MUST have drowsed again and again, with starts of semi-wakefulness. At last, in one of these, I knew vaguely that the small twin moons, Phobos and Deimos, had risen and were making huge and far-flung shadows with the domeless towers; shadows that almost touched the glimmering, shrouded forms of my companions.

The whole scene was locked in a petrific stillness; and none of the sleepers stirred. Then, as my lids were about to close, I received an impression of movement in the frozen gloom; and it seemed to me that a portion of the foremost shadow had detached itself and was crawling toward Octave, who lay nearer to the ruins than we others.

Even through my heavy lethargy, I was disturbed by a warning of something unnatural and perhaps ominous. I started to sit up; and even as I moved, the shadowy object, whatever it was, drew back and became merged once more in the greater shadow. Its vanishment startled me into full wakefulness; and yet I could not be sure that I had actually seen the thing. In that brief, final glimpse, it had seemed like a roughly circular piece of cloth or leather, dark and crumpled, and twelve or fourteen inches in diameter, that ran along the ground with the doubling movement of an inch-worm, causing it to fold and unfold in a startling manner as it went.

I did not go to sleep again for nearly an hour; and if it had not been for the extreme cold, I should doubtless have gotten up to investigate and make sure whether I had really beheld an object of such bizarre nature or had merely dreamt it. But more and more I began to convince myself that the thing was too unlikely and fantastical to have been anything but the figment of a dream. And at last I nodded off into light slumber.

The chill, demoniac sighing of the *jaar* across the jagged walls awoke me, and I saw that the faint moonlight had received the hueless accession of early dawn. We all arose, and prepared our breakfast with

fingers that grew numb in spite of the spirit-lamps.

My queer visual experience during the night had taken on more than ever a fantasmagoric unreality; and I gave it no more than a passing thought and did not speak of it to the others. We were all eager to begin our explorations; and shortly after sunrise we started on a preliminary tour of examination.

Strangely, as it seemed, the two Martians refused to accompany us. Stolid and taciturn, they gave no explicit reason; but evidently nothing would induce them to enter Yoh-Vombis. Whether or not they were afraid of the ruins, we were unable to determine: their enigmatic faces, with the small oblique eyes and huge, flaring nostrils, betrayed neither fear nor any other emotion intelligible to man. In reply to our questions, they merely said that no Aihai had set foot among the ruins for ages. Apparently there was some mysterious taboo in connection with the place.

For equipment in that preliminary tour we took along only our electric torches and a crowbar. Our other tools, and some cartridges of high explosives, we left at our camp, to be used later if necessary, after we had surveyed the ground. One or two of us owned automatics; but these also were left behind; for it seemed absurd to imagine that any form of life would be encountered among the ruins.

Octave was visibly excited as we began our inspection, and maintained a running fire of exclamatory comment. The rest of us were subdued and silent: it was impossible to shake off the somber awe and wonder that fell upon us from those megalithic stones.

We went on for some distance among the triangular, terraced buildings, following the zigzag streets that conformed to this peculiar architecture. Most of the towers were more or less dilapidated; and everywhere we saw the deep erosion wrought by cycles of blowing wind and sand, which, in many cases, had worn into roundness the sharp angles of the mighty walls. We entered some of the towers, but found utter emptiness within. Whatever they had contained in the way of furnishings must long ago have crumbled into dust; and the dust had been blown away by the searching desert gales.

At length we came to the wall of a vast terrace, hewn from the plateau itself. On this terrace, the central buildings were grouped like a sort of acropolis. A flight of time-eaten steps, designed for longer limbs than those of men or even the gangling modern Martians, afforded access to the hewn summit.

Pausing, we decided to defer our investigation of the higher buildings, which, being more exposed than the others, were doubly ruinous and dilapidated, and in all likelihood would offer little for our trouble. Octave had begun to voice his disappointment over our failure to find anything in the nature of artifacts or carvings that would throw light on the history of Yoh-Vombis.

Then, a little to the right of the stairway, we perceived an entrance in the main wall, half choked with ancient debris. Behind the heap of detritus, we found the beginning of a downward flight of steps. Darkness poured from the opening, noisome and musty with primordial stagnancies of decay; and we could see nothing below the first steps, which gave the appearance of being suspended over a black gulf.

Throwing his torch-beam into the abyss, Octave began to descend the stairs. His eager voice called us to follow.

At the bottom of the high, awkward steps, we found ourselves in a long and roomy vault, like a subterranean hallway. Its floor was deep with siftings of im-

memorial dust. The air was singularly heavy, as if the lees of an ancient atmosphere, less tenuous than that of Mars today, had settled down and remained in that stagnant darkness. It was harder to breathe than the outer air: it was filled with unknown effluvia; and the light dust arose before us at every step, diffusing a faintness of bygone corruption, like the dust of powdered mummies.

At the end of the vault, before a strait and lofty doorway, our torches revealed an immense shallow urn or pan, supported on short cube-shaped legs, and wrought from a dull, blackish-green material. In its bottom, we perceived a deposit of dark and cinder-like fragments, which gave off a slight but disagreeable pungence, like the phantom of some more powerful odor. Octave, bending over the rim, began to cough and sneeze as he inhaled it.

"That stuff, whatever it was, must have been a pretty strong fumigant," he observed. "The people of Yoh-Vombis may have used it to disinfect the vaults."

The doorway beyond the shallow urn admitted us to a larger chamber, whose floor was comparatively free of dust. We found that the dark stone beneath our feet was marked off in multiform geometric patterns, traced with ochreous ore, amid which, as in Egyptian cartouches, hieroglyphics and highly formalized drawings were enclosed. We could make little from most of them; but the figures in many were doubtless designed to represent the Yorhis themselves. Like the Aihais, they were tall and angular, with great, bellows-like chests. The ears and nostrils, as far as we could judge, were not so huge and flaring as those of the modern Martians. All of these Yorhis were depicted as being nude; but in one of the cartouches, done in a far hastier style than the others, we perceived two figures whose high, conical craniums were wrapped in what seemed to be a sort of turban, which they were about to remove or adjust. The artist seemed to have laid a peculiar emphasis on the odd gesture with which the sinuous, four-jointed fingers were plucking at these head-dresses; and the whole posture was unexplainably contorted.

From the second vault, passages ramified in all directions, leading to a veritable warren of catacombs. Here, enormous pot-bellied urns of the same material as the fumigating-pan, but taller than a man's head and fitted with angular-handled stoppers, were ranged in solemn rows along the walls, leaving scant room for two of us to walk abreast. When we succeeded in removing one of the huge stoppers, we saw that the jar was filled to the rim with ashes and charred fragments of bone. Doubtless (as is still the Martian custom) the Yorhis had stored the cremated remains of whole families in single urns.

EVEN Octave became silent as we went on; and a sort of meditative awe seemed to replace his former excitement. We others, I think, were utterly weighed down to a man by the solid gloom of a concept-defying antiquity, into which it seemed that we were going farther and farther at every step.

The shadows fluttered before us like the monstrous and misshapen wings of phantom bats. There was nothing anywhere but the atom-like dust of ages, and the jars that held the ashes of a long-extinct people. But, clinging to the high roof in one of the farther vaults, I saw a dark and corrugated patch of circular form, like a withered fungus. It was impossible to reach the thing; and we went on after peering at it with many futile conjectures. Oddly enough, I failed to remember at that moment the crumpled,

shadowy object I had seen or dreamt of the night before.

I have no idea how far we had gone, when we came to the last vault; but it seemed that we had been wandering for ages in that forgotten underworld. The air was growing fouler and more irrespirable, with a thick, sodden quality, as if from a sediment of material rottenness; and we had about decided to turn back. Then, without warning, at the end of a long, urn-lined catacomb, we found ourselves confronted by a blank wall.

Here we came upon one of the strangest and most mystifying of our discoveries —a mummified and incredibly dessicated figure, standing erect against the wall. It was more than seven feet in height, of a brown, bituminous color, and was wholly nude except for a sort of black cowl that covered the upper head and drooped down at the sides in wrinkled folds. From the size and general contour, it was plainly one of the ancient Yorhis—perhaps the sole member of this race whose body had remained intact.

We all felt an inexpressible thrill at the sheer age of this shrivelled thing, which, in the dry air of the vault, had endured through all the historic and geologic vicissitudes of the planet, to provide a visible link with lost cycles.

Then, as we peered closer with our torches, we saw *why* the mummy had maintained an upright position. At ankles, knees, waist, shoulders and neck it was shackled to the wall by heavy metal bands, so deeply eaten and embrowned with a sort of rust that we had failed to distinguish them at first sight in the shadow. The strange cowl on the head, when closelier studied, continued to baffle us. It was covered with a fine, mold-like pile, unclean and dusty as ancient cobwebs. Something about it, I know not what, was abhorrent and revolting.

"By Jove! this is a real find!" ejaculated Octave, as he thrust his torch into the mummified face, where shadows moved like living things in the pit-deep hollows of the eyes and the huge triple nostrils and wide ears that flared upward beneath the cowl.

Still lifting the torch, he put out his free hand and touched the body very lightly. Tentative as the touch had been, the lower part of the barrel-like torso, the legs, the hands and forearms all seemed to dissolve into powder, leaving the head and upper body and arms still hanging in their metal fetters. The progress of decay had been queerly unequal, for the remnant portions gave no sign of disintegration.

Octave cried out in dismay, and then began to cough and sneeze, as the cloud of brown powder, floating with airy lightness, enveloped him. We others all stepped back to avoid the powder. Then, above the spreading cloud, I saw an unbelievable thing. The black cowl on the mummy's head began to curl and twitch upward at the corners, it writhed with a verminous motion, it fell from the withered cranium, seeming to fold and unfold convulsively in midair as it fell. Then it dropped on the bare head of Octave who, in his disconcertment at the crumbling of the mummy, had remained standing close to the wall. At that instant, in a start of profound terror, I remembered the thing that had inched itself from the shadows of Yoh-Vombis in the light of the twin moons, and had drawn back like a figment of slumber at my first waking movement.

Cleaving closely as a tightened cloth, the thing enfolded Octave's hair and brow and eyes, and he shrieked wildly, with incoherent pleas for help, and tore with frantic fingers at the cowl, but failed to loosen it. Then his cries began to

mount in a mad crescendo of agony, as if beneath some instrument of infernal torture; and he danced and capered blindly about the vault, eluding us with strange celerity as we all sprang forward in an effort to reach him and release him from his weird incumbrance. The whole happening was mysterious as a nightmare; but the thing that had fallen on his head was plainly some unclassified form of Martian life, which, contrary to all the known laws of science, had survived in those primordial catacombs. We must rescue him from its clutches if we could.

WE TRIED to close in on the frenzied figure of our chief—which, in the far from roomy space between the last urns and the wall, should have been an easy matter. But, darting away, in a manner doubly incomprehensible because of his blindfolded condition, he circled about us and ran past, to disappear among the urns toward the outer labyrinth of intersecting catacombs.

"My God! What has happened to him?" cried Harper. "The man acts as if he were possessed."

There was obviously no time for a discussion of the enigma, and we all followed Octave as speedily as our astonishment would permit. We had lost sight of him in the darkness; and when we came to the first division of the vaults, we were doubtful as to which passage he had taken, till we heard a shrill scream, several times repeated, in a catacomb on the extreme left. There was a shrill, unearthly quality in those screams, which may have been due to the long-stagnant air or the peculiar acoustics of the ramifying caverns. But somehow I could not imagine them as issuing from human lips —at least not from those of a living man. They seemed to contain a soulless, mechanical agony, as if they had been wrung from a devil-driven corpse.

Thrusting our torches before us into the lurching, fleeing shadows, we raced along between rows of mighty urns. The screaming had died away in sepulchral silence; but far off we heard the light and muffled thud of running feet. We followed in headlong pursuit; but, gasping painfully in the vitiated, miasmal air, we were soon compelled to slacken our pace without coming in sight of Octave. Very faintly, and farther away than ever, like the tomb-swallowed steps of a phantom, we heard his vanishing footfalls. Then they ceased; and we heard nothing, except our own convulsive breathing, and the blood that throbbed in our temple-veins like steadily beaten drums of alarm.

We went on, dividing our party into three contingents when we came to a triple branching of the caverns. Harper and Halgren and I took the middle passage, and after we had gone on for an endless interval without finding any trace of Octave, and had threaded our way through recesses piled to the roof with colossal urns that must have held the ashes of a hundred generations, we came out in the huge chamber with the geometric floor-designs. Here, very shortly, we were joined by the others, who had likewise failed to locate our missing leader.

It would be useless to detail our renewed and hour-long search of the myriad vaults, many of which we had not hitherto explored. All were empty, as far as any sign of life was concerned. I remember passing once more through the vault in which I had seen the dark, rounded patch on the ceiling, and noting with a shudder that the patch was gone. It was a miracle that we did not lose ourselves in that underworld maze; but at last we came back again to the final catacomb, in which we had found the shackled mummy.

We heard a measured and recurrent clangor as we neared the place—a most

alarming and mystifying sound under the circumstances. It was like the hammering of ghouls on some forgotten mausoleum. When we drew nearer, the beams of our torches revealed a sight that was no less unexplainable than unexpected. A human figure, with its back toward us and the head concealed by a swollen black object that had the size and form of a sofa cushion, was standing near the remains of the mummy and was striking at the wall with a pointed metal bar. How long Octave had been there, and where he had found the bar, we could not know. But the blank wall had crumbled away beneath his furious blows, leaving on the floor a pile of comet-like fragments; and a small, narrow door, of the same ambiguous material as the cinerary urns and the fumigating-pan, had been laid bare.

Amazed, uncertain, inexpressibly bewildered, we were all incapable of action or volition at that moment. The whole business was too fantastic and too horrifying, and it was plain that Octave had been overcome by some sort of madness. I, for one, felt the violent upsurge of sudden nausea when I had identified the loathsomely bloated thing that clung to Octave's head and drooped in obscene tumescence on his neck. I did not dare to surmise the causation of its bloating.

BEFORE any of us could recover our faculties, Octave flung aside the metal bar and began to fumble for something in the wall. It must have been a hidden spring; though how he could have known its location or existence is beyond all legitimate conjecture. With a dull, hideous grating, the uncovered door swung inward, thick and ponderous as a mausolean slab, leaving an aperture from which the nether midnight seemed to well like a flood of eon-buried foulness. Somehow, at that instant, our electric torches appeared to flicker and grow dim; and we all breathed a suffocating fetor, like a draft from inner worlds of immemorial putrescence.

Octave had turned toward us now, and he stood in an idle posture before the open door, like one who has finished some ordained task. I was the first of our party to throw off the paralyzing spell; and pulling out a clasp-knife—the only semblance of a weapon which I carried—I ran over to him. He moved back, but not quickly enough to evade me, when I stabbed with the four-inch blade at the black, turgescent mass that enveloped his whole upper head and hung down upon his eyes.

What the thing was, I should prefer not to imagine—if it were possible to imagine. It was formless as a great slug, with neither head nor tail nor apparent organs—an unclean, puffy, leathery thing, covered with that fine, mold-like fur of which I have spoken. The knife tore into it as if through rotten parchment, making a long gash, and the horror appeared to collapse like a broken bladder. Out of it there gushed a sickening torrent of human blood, mingled with dark, filiated masses that may have been half-dissolved hair, and floating gelatinous lumps like molten bone, and shreds of a curdy white substance. At the same time, Octave began to stagger, and went down at full length on the floor. Disturbed by his fall, the mummy-dust arose about him in a curling cloud, beneath which he lay mortally still.

Conquering my revulsion, and choking with the dust, I bent over him and tore the flaccid, oozing horror from his head. It came with unexpected ease, as if I had removed a limp rag: but I wish to God that I had let it remain. Beneath, there was no longer a human cranium, for all had been eaten away, even to the eyebrows, and the half-devoured brain was

laid bare as I lifted the cowl-like object. I dropped the unnamable thing from fingers that had grown suddenly nerveless, and it turned over as it fell, revealing on the nether side many rows of pinkish suckers, arranged in circles about a pallid disk that was covered with nerve-like filaments, suggesting a sort of plexus.

My companions had pressed forward behind me; but, for an appreciable interval, no one spoke.

"How long do you suppose he has been dead?" It was Halgren who whispered the awful question, which we had all been asking ourselves. Apparently no one felt able or willing to answer it; and we could only stare in horrible, timeless fascination at Octave.

At length I made an effort to avert my gaze; and turning at random, I saw the remnants of the shackled mummy, and noted for the first time, with mechanical, unreal horror, the half-eaten condition of the withered head. From this, my gaze was diverted to the newly opened door at one side, without perceiving for a moment what had drawn my attention. Then, startled, I beheld beneath my torch, far down beyond the door, as if in some nether pit, a seething, multitudinous, worm-like movement of crawling shadows. They seemed to boil up in the darkness; and then, over the broad threshold of the vault, there poured the verminous vanguard of a countless army: things that were kindred to the monstrous, diabolic leech I had torn from Octave's eaten head. Some were thin and flat, like writhing, doubling disks of cloth or leather, and others were more or less poddy, and crawled with glutted slowness. What they had found to feed on in the sealed, eternal midnight I do not know; and I pray that I never shall know.

I sprang back and away from them, electrified with terror, sick with loathing, and the black army inched itself unendingly with nightmare swiftness from the unsealed abyss, like the nauseous vomit of horror-sated hells. As it poured toward us, burying Octave's body from sight in a writhing wave, I saw a stir of life from the seemingly dead thing I had cast aside, and saw the loathly struggle which it made to right itself and join the others.

But neither I nor my companions could endure to look longer. We turned and ran between the mighty rows of urns, with the slithering mass of demon leeches close upon us, and scattered in blind panic when we came to the first division of the vaults. Heedless of each other or of anything but the urgency of flight, we plunged into the ramifying passages at random. Behind me, I heard some one stumble and go down, with a curse that mounted to an insane shrieking; but I knew that if I halted and went back, it would be only to invite the same baleful doom that had overtaken the hindmost of our party.

Still clutching the electric torch and my open clasp-knife, I ran along a minor passage which, I seemed to remember, would conduct with more or less directness upon the large outer vault with the painted floor. Here I found myself alone. The others had kept to the main catacombs; and I heard far off a muffled babel of mad cries, as if several of them had been seized by their pursuers.

It seemed that I must have been mistaken about the direction of the passage; for it turned and twisted in an unfamiliar manner, with many intersections, and I soon found that I was lost in the black labyrinth, where the dust had lain unstirred by living feet for inestimable generations. The cinerary warren had grown still once more; and I heard my own frenzied panting, loud and stertorous as that of a Titan in the dead silence.

Suddenly, as I went on, my torch disclosed a human figure coming toward me in the gloom. Before I could master my startlement, the figure had passed me with long, machine-like strides, as if returning to the inner vaults. I think it was Harper, since the height and build were about right for him; but I am not altogether sure, for the eyes and upper head were muffled by a dark, inflated cowl, and the pale lips were locked as if in a silence of tetanic torture—or death. Whoever he was, he had dropped his torch; and he was running blindfold, in utter darkness, beneath the impulsion of that unearthly vampirism, to seek the very fountain-head of the unloosed horror. I knew that he was beyond human help; and I did not even dream of trying to stop him.

Trembling violently, I resumed my flight, and was passed by two more of our party, stalking by with mechanical swiftness and sureness, and cowled with those Satanic leeches. The others must have returned by way of the main passages; for I did not meet them; and I was never to see them again.

The remainder of my flight is a blur of pandemonian terror. Once more, after thinking that I was near the outer cavern, I found myself astray, and fled through a ranged eternity of monstrous urns, in vaults that must have extended for an unknown distance beyond our explorations. It seemed that I had gone on for years; and my lungs were choking with the eon-dead air, and my legs were ready to crumble beneath me, when I saw far off a tiny point of blessed daylight. I ran toward it, with all the terrors of the alien darkness crowding behind me, and accursed shadows flittering before, and saw that the vault ended in a low, ruinous entrance, littered by rubble on which there fell an arc of thin sunshine.

It was another entrance than the one by which we had penetrated this lethal underworld. I was within a dozen feet of the opening when, without sound or other intimation, something dropped upon my head from the roof above, blinding me instantly and closing upon me like a tautened net. My brow and scalp, at the same time, were shot through with a million needle-like pangs—a manifold, ever-growing agony that seemed to pierce the very bone and converge from all sides upon my inmost brain.

The terror and suffering of that moment were worse than aught which the hells of earthly madness or delirium could ever contain. I felt the foul, vampiric clutch of an atrocious death—and of more than death.

I believe that I dropped the torch; but the fingers of my right hand had still retained the open knife. Instinctively—since I was hardly capable of conscious volition—I raised the knife and slashed blindly, again and again, many times, at the thing that had fastened its deadly folds upon me. The blade must have gone through and through the clinging monstrosity, to gash my own flesh in a score of places; but I did not feel the pain of those wounds in the million-throbbing torment that possessed me.

At last I saw light, and saw that a black strip, loosened from above my eyes and dripping with my own blood, was hanging down my cheek. It writhed a little, even as it hung, and I ripped it away, and ripped the other remnants of the thing, tatter by oozing, bloody tatter, from off my brow and head. Then I staggered toward the entrance; and the wan light turned to a far, receding, dancing flame before me as I lurched and fell outside the cavern—a flame that fled like the last star of creation above the yawning, sliding chaos and oblivion into which I descended. . . .

I AM told that my unconsciousness was of brief duration. I came to myself, with the cryptic faces of the two Martian guides bending over me. My head was full of lancinating pains, and half-remembered terrors closed upon my mind like the shadows of muttering harpies. I rolled over, and looked back toward the cavern-mouth, from which the Martians, after finding me, had seemingly dragged me for some little distance. The mouth was under the terraced angle of an outer building, and within sight of our camp.

I stared at the black opening with hideous fascination, and descried a shadowy stirring in the gloom—the writhing, verminous movement of things that pressed forward from the darkness but did not emerge into the light. Doubtless they could not endure the sun, those creatures of ultramundane night and cycle-sealed corruption.

It was then that the ultimate horror, the beginning madness, came upon me. Amid my crawling revulsion, my nausea-prompted desire to flee from that seething cavern-mouth, there rose an abhorrently conflicting impulse to return; to thread my backward way through all the catacombs, as the others had done; to go down where never men save they, the inconceivably doomed and accursed, had ever gone; to seek beneath that damnable compulsion a nether world that human thought can never picture. There was a black light, a soundless calling, in the vaults of my brain: the implanted summons of the Thing, like a permeating and sorcerous poison. It lured me to the subterranean door that was walled up by the dying people of Yoh-Vombis, to immure those hellish and immortal leeches, those dark parasites that engraft their own abominable life on the half-eaten brains of the dead. It called me to the depths beyond, where dwell the noisome, necromantic Ones, of whom the leeches, with all their powers of vampirism and diabolism, are but the merest minions. . . .

It was only the two Aihais who prevented me from going back. I struggled, I fought them insanely as they strove to retard me with their spongy arms; but I must have been pretty thoroughly exhausted from all the superhuman adventures of the day; and I went down once more, after a little, into fathomless nothingness, from which I floated out at long intervals, to realize that I was being carried across the desert toward Ignarh.

Well, that is all my story. I have tried to tell it fully and coherently, at a cost that would be unimaginable to the sane . . . to tell it before the madness falls upon me again, as it will very soon—as it is doing now. . . . Yes, I have told my story . . . and you have written it all out, haven't you? Now I must go back to Yoh-Vombis—back across the desert and down through all the catacombs to the vaster vaults beneath. Something is in my brain, that commands me and will direct me. . . . I tell you, I must go. . . .

POSTSCRIPT

AS AN intern in the territorial hospital at Ignarh, I had charge of the singular case of Rodney Severn, the one surviving member of the Octave Expedition to Yoh-Vombis, and took down the above story from his dictation. Severn had been brought to the hospital by the Martian guides of the Expedition. He was suffering from a horribly lacerated and inflamed condition of the scalp and brow, and was wildly delirious part of the time and had to be held down in his bed during recurrent seizures of a mania whose violence was doubly inexplicable in view of his extreme debility.

The lacerations, as will have been learned from the story, were mainly self-

inflicted. They were mingled with numerous small round wounds, easily distinguished from the knife-slashes, and arranged in regular circles, through which an unknown poison had been injected into Severn's scalp. The causation of these wounds was difficult to explain; unless one were to believe that Severn's story was true, and was no mere figment of his illness. Speaking for myself, in the light of what afterward occurred, I feel that I have no other resource than to believe it. There are strange things on the red planet; and I can only second the wish that was expressed by the doomed archeologist in regard to future explorations.

The night after he had finished telling me his story, while another doctor than myself was supposedly on duty, Severn managed to escape from the hospital, doubtless in one of the strange seizures at which I have hinted: a most astonishing thing, for he had seemed weaker than ever after the long strain of his terrible narrative, and his demise had been hourly expected. More astonishing still, his bare footsteps were found in the desert, going toward Yoh-Vombis, till they vanished in the path of a light sandstorm; but no trace of Severn himself has yet been discovered.

Corpse-Candle

By EDWARD C. JENKINS

Night, dark and fearsome, settles o'er the fen;
  The bracken, mist-sprayed, hoary in the gloom,
Like wraiths of evil, beckons luckless men
  On, that the black morass may be their tomb
For evermore. The swamp yields not its dead
  Until the awful Judgment Day is here.
Will-o'-the-wisp's blue ghostly light so dread,
  Like demons' eyes, congeals the soul with fear
Of death—slow death—sucked down in slimy mire
  That bubbles like the very broth of hell,
Brewed on the Evil One's eternal fire,
  And there be none to toll the passing-bell
For those who chase fantasms in the night,
  Lured by the foul corpse-candle's baleful glow
Into the bog to sink from mortal sight,
  Drawn down by imps of darkness from below.

"Heads upward!" I cried. "They're training weapons on us!"

The Terror Planet

By EDMOND HAMILTON

The brain-men of Uranus—the amazing thought-tubes of the Brants—a story of red battle on another planet

"I AM visiting the planet Uranus tonight!"

I stared at Robert Hunt. He was leaning forward in his chair as he spoke, his keen face gleaming with suppressed excitement. Both he and Jean Hunt, his slim, dark-haired sister, seemed watching the effect on me of what he had said. We were sitting in the soft-lit living-room of their up-state country home, where their telegram had brought me this night.

"Visiting Uranus tonight, Hunt?" I said finally, smiling. "Is Jean going with you or is this only a week-end trip?"

"I am not joking, Devlin," said Hunt calmly, and his sister nodded affirmation. "Rob is really in earnest, Dev."

"In earnest?" I repeated, my smile fad-

ing. "Do you mean to say, Hunt, that you, an astronomer, are talking seriously of a visit to one of the most distant worlds of the solar system?"

Hunt's eyes were unwavering. "I mean just that."

"But how—what——" I attempted, when he interrupted.

"I know just how the idea must seem to you, Devlin, but I want you to hear me before you consign me to a mental ward.

"In the first place"—Hunt was leaning earnestly forward—"you know how I've been criticized and ridiculed since I announced my belief that Uranus is a world as habitable as earth. Despite the fact that very little is known for certain about the planet, my fellow-astronomers called me every name known, it seemed to them so impossible.

"Yet what, I asked, was so impossible about it? It is true that Uranus lies more than a billion miles farther from the sun than earth and so must receive less light and heat, but it must receive sufficient light for life and undoubtedly is warmed by its own interior heat. It is a larger world than earth but because of its lower density its gravitation must be much the same as here. And the clouds seen upon it are proof that it has an atmosphere.

"Yet these facts were ignored and my theory of Uranus as a habitable planet was derided. I decided that I could prove the thing to the world in just one way, by reaching Uranus and bringing back incontrovertible proofs. The thing became a mania with me, and in the last two years I've worked unceasingly on it, trying to find a way to span the gulf of more than a billion miles that lies between our world and Uranus.

"I found the way, Devlin. I discovered a method of bending the lines of radiated gravitational force, making it possible for me to concentrate momentarily all the tremendous attractive power of any planet upon a single point or object. You see what that meant? It meant that I could build a strong steel air-tight chamber like a diving-bell, here on earth, and by means of the mechanism inside it could concentrate on that bell for a moment all the terrific attractive power of Uranus!

"The bell and all in it would instantly be torn loose from earth's hold and jerked across the gulf of space with unthinkable speed to Uranus! Just before reaching it the mechanism would automatically reverse to make it land gently. Those inside might be made unconscious by the awful speed but would not be crushed because they would be pulled as well as the bell around them. And I would need only to reverse the process to hurtle back from Uranus to earth!"

Hunt paused, and I stared at him with a doubt tinctured by awe. Jean was watching her brother in mingled pride and anxiety.

"And you've done that, Hunt?" I ventured. "You've actually built such a space-bell?"

Hunt nodded. "Yes, Devlin, and it's taken more than a year. I had a helper part of that time, Harker Crail, whom you may remember from our university days. I know you never liked Crail, but he was a fine physicist with exceptional mechanical skill, and between us the thing flew. But Crail gave me trouble, wanting me to exploit and commercialize my discovery, and when I found that he was also annoying Jean with his attentions I booted him off the place, he swearing all kinds of vengeance.

"With Crail gone the whole work fell on me, and I've been put to it to finish it. If it hadn't been for Jean's help I couldn't have finished, but it's done now, and out there in my factory behind the house the space-bell is ready to the last bolt. That's

all there is to it, Devlin. Uranus is now in opposition to earth, over a billion miles outward. Tonight I'm flashing out to it, and if I can spend a few days there and return I'll bring back evidence of its habitability that I'll ram down the collective throat of the astronomical world!"

"Then you're going alone!" I exclaimed.

"He is," Jean told me rebelliously.

"Yes, I'm going it alone," Hunt said. "It's why I wired you to come, Devlin—to look after Jean and things here while I'm gone."

"I'll be glad to, of course," I told him. "But this venture of yours, Hunt—I believe wholly in you, yet this attempt to reach a world so far seems fantastic."

"I know that it must seem so," he answered quietly, "yet I am going to do it in the space-bell tonight. I want you to see that bell, Devlin—in another hour I'm starting——"

HE HAD risen, and Jean and I followed him out of the house into the soft black velvet of the summer night. Some distance from us loomed the square dark bulk that I took to be his factory, Hunt leading the way eagerly toward it. As we followed him along a well-worn path I found myself looking up toward the thick-strewn stars that gleamed in the skies like a scattered spawn of light.

Up there among them was Uranus, I knew. Could any man or men ever reach that far-swinging world? It still seemed fantastic, unreal. I saw Jean glancing upward with me, her fine and mobile face shadowed by apprehension. Then we were at the factory building's steel door, Hunt fumbling impatiently with his keys.

To our surprize the door, as we stood there, swung open a little in the breeze. Hunt turned, astonished.

"Why, I locked this an hour ago," he said. "Were you out here, Jean?"

She shook her head. "I was waiting for Dev to arrive."

Hunt's face changed suddenly and he flung the door open, leapt inside. I followed, with Jean close beside me, into a dark supply or stock-room of some sort. Hunt had found its inner door and as he swung it wide I glimpsed the big and bright-lit inner room of the facory building.

That bigger room seemed crowded with machinery and its roof had been opened or removed in some way, only the star-strewn sky over our heads. At the room's center stood a thing that I knew could only be the space-bell, a tall metal object of true bell shape, nine feet across the base, with porthole-like little windows and a wide door swinging open from its side.

Beside this door, turning as though surprized by us in the very act of entering the bell, stood a man whose dark face had gone livid.

"Crail!" cried Hunt. "So you came back to steal——"

"Hunt—look out!" I yelled.

A pistol had appeared in Crail's hand and spat flame toward us! I had pushed Jean aside and the bullet sang past Hunt and between us two. Before Crail could fire again Hunt had rushed upon him, clutched him, and in the next moment's fierce struggle they reeled sidewise through the open door into the space-bell. I rushed forward, shouting to Jean to stay back, and leapt into the bell after them.

I had but a glimpse of the bell's interior, of shielded apparatus and glass-faced dials and a row of shining levers on one side. The two were wrestling on the floor beneath these lever-controls, Crail trying to raise his pistol and Hunt to grasp it. I rushed heedlessly toward them, but as I bent, a savage blow caught my chin and knocked me sprawling, Hunt in the same

moment wresting the pistol from the other and stepping back. Jean was running fearlessly into the bell and Hunt was raising the pistol toward Crail.

The thing was like a set tableau for an instant, Crail rising with hate-mad eyes by the control-panel, Hunt's pistol lifting toward him, I staggering to my feet and Jean bursting in through the door. I think Hunt meant only to menace the other, but Crail must have expected a bullet, and in his insane hate and desperation saw the bell's open door and knew what swift death it meant for all of us in the awful cold of airless space. For he spun around, reached wildly toward the panel, the levers.

"Damn you, Hunt, you'll go with me —all of you!" he screamed, his hand on a lever.

"Jean—*the door!*" yelled Hunt, face gray as he leapt.

The door clanged as Jean slammed it shut in the same moment that Crail shot down the lever. Then for all of us it was as though the bottom of existence had dropped out. Titanic forces seemed to flood up through us from the bell's flat floor, the bright-lit factory room vanished from outside with a splitting roar of thunder, and as the bell hurtled up and outward into the vast darkness of space a swifter and deeper darkness crashed across my consciousness.

2

RETURNING consciousness made me aware first that I was lying with body twisted uncomfortably, and next that from somewhere close by a noisy clamor was coming to my ears. For a moment or more I lay unmoving, then weakly struggled to a sitting position and opened my eyes. My first glance showed me that I was still inside the space-bell.

It was lying now on its side, though, and through its little window-ports came shafts of thin sunlight that fell on the sprawled forms of Hunt and Jean and Crail, beside me. None of them seemed hurt, and already they were stirring with reviving consciousness. But then the increased clamor from outside made me turn toward one of the window-ports. I looked forth, first in blank amazement and then in swiftly mounting horror.

Outside was a scene recalling the lands of nightmare. Around the space-bell there stretched in the thin sunlight a dense and dark green forest that was of appearance unearthly. It seemed at first glance a single mighty mass of vegetation, so solidly packed and entwined were the leafless, serpent-like tendril-growths that composed it. They towered high around the space-bell, which had crushed a clear space about itself.

Yet this leafless forest was not the strangest feature of the scene outside. Moving about the space-bell were several scores of creatures so grotesque and horrible that my brain questioned what my eyes saw.

They were beast-men. It is the only term that remotely describes them and it is inadequate. Imagine men who have become quadrupeds, men who run and walk on hands and legs, whose bodies are big and brute-muscled and covered with thick hair! Their heads were true shaggy beast-heads, with wild green eyes, flat nostril-openings instead of noses, and wide-jawed mouths with projecting fangs!

Human beasts—beast-men! My senses shook as I stared at the unbelievable scene. They were roaming in animal-like fashion about the space-bell, snarling and sniffing at it. Then I uttered an exclamation as I saw that some of them had gripped great stones awkwardly in their front limbs and were pounding with them on the space-bell's door, making with

every blow the resounding clamor that had awakened me.

My exclamation was echoed from behind me. Hunt had risen, helping Jean to her feet, and they and Crail were looking forth with me. Hunt's eyes seemed starting as he looked out at the weird scene.

"Uranus!" he exclaimed. "Devlin, we've reached Uranus—the space-bell's mechanism was set for it and when Crail tried to kill us all in the cold of space by opening the control he hurtled us instead across the void in minutes to this world!"

"But those things outside!" I cried. "Are they beasts or humans?"

Jean had grasped my arm, her eyes horror-filled as she looked out. "They can't be human," she was saying. "They must be beasts, yet there's something so terribly man-like about them!"

Hunt's eyes were brilliant with excitement. "They're a race wholly unlike any on earth," he said. "They seem beasts, yet it's evident from their actions that they must have some rudimentary intelligence——"

"And it's just as evident that they want mighty badly to get into the space-bell," cut in Crail's cool voice from behind us. "They'll have the door broken if they hammer much longer—this position's too nasty to waste time talking."

I turned on him in sudden remembrance and wrath. "It's a position that your murderousness brought us into!" I exclaimed. "It's no fault of yours that we're not four frozen corpses right now, damn you!"

A cold smile crossed his dark face. "Emotional as always, Devlin. The fact that I heartily desired to take you all to hell with me a little while ago doesn't alter the fact that I want just as heartily to get out of this."

"Enough of this fighting!" Hunt intervened authoritatively. "Crail, we'll settle with you later, but the main thing now is to get out of here, and you've brains enough to know that your best chance is to work with us. Those beast-men outside will have the door down in minutes if we stay here. Yet I don't see how we're going to leave."

"Can't we just reverse the controls and use earth's attraction to pull the space-bell back to our own world?" Jean asked.

Hunt shook his head. "The space-bell has to stand on its base so that it will be pulled straight toward the attracting planet, and not whirled off on a tangent into space. And it's now lying on its side."

"But we can right it?" I exclaimed.

"Not without going outside," Hunt returned.

"And our beast-like friends are there to welcome us," Crail added pointedly.

There was a little silence. Hunt was staring from a window-port at our weird besiegers, whose every blow shook the whole space-bell. Jean turned toward me with a brave attempt at a smile, and instinctively I clasped her hand in reassurance. Hunt turned back to us.

"We'll have to risk it!" he declared. "Devlin, I'll fling the door open, and you and I and Crail can rush out and raise the bell back onto its base. The air must be breathable out there or those creatures couldn't live, and it's apparent that, as I expected, Uranus' gravity is much the same as earth's."

"But if the brutes rush us?" I asked.

"I have this pistol," Hunt said, "and anyway it will take but a moment to right the bell. Jean, you stay inside."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," she told him calmly. "It's going to take all of us to right the space-bell."

"Well, you can help, then," Hunt said doubtfully, "but all of you streak back in-

side the instant we've done it. You're ready?"

We nodded, and Hunt bent forward to slip back the bolt of the heavy door. As he shot it back the pounding outside halted and through the window-port I saw the beast-men drawing back a little from the door. We were crouching ready to rush out and as I glanced at Jean's face, white now despite herself, there flamed again in me a red anger at Crail for bringing her into this predicament with us. But then Hunt had swung back the door and we were leaping out.

A WAVE of warm and heavy air smote our faces as we emerged into full view of the beast-men, who were but a half-dozen feet from us. Our appearance seemed for the moment to transfix them with surprize, for they stood rooted to the ground with eyes upon us. We sprang toward the space-bell's narrower top-end, lying now along the ground.

In an instant we had grasped it and were lifting frantically. I heard a grunt from Hunt, heard the muscles of Crail and myself cracking as we put every ounce of effort into the lift. The bell's great weight seemed to defy us, it tottered in midair for a nerve-racking moment on its lower rim, then slowly rocked over to settle on its base. But as it did so there came a chorus of snarling cries from behind us —a shout from Hunt—the roar of his pistol.

Crail and I whirled, my hand on Jean's. The beast-men, their first amazement gone, were leaping toward us!

Hunt's weapon roared again as we stumbled toward the bell's door, and I glimpsed one of the leaping brutes fall and twist in midair. But the others were on us before any of us had reached the door, Jean's hand was jerked from my grasp, and we were instantly the center of a wild and confused combat. Hairy bodies smote us as great clawed limbs grasped us, Crail and I raining frantic blows about us as Jean was torn from my side.

I heard Hunt's weapon detonating and saw him for an instant, his face deadly, as he shot down the brutes that had grasped his sister and came toward us through the mêlée, dealing skull-crushing blows with the heavy pistol's butt. But a snarling beast-man leapt clear in the air upon his back, bringing him to his knees, and instantly others were upon him and dragging him away.

I was pulled from my feet, and as I went down flailing furiously with balled fists I saw Crail and Hunt being dragged together toward the forest by a knot of the brutes. Two others were leaping toward Jean. At the sight I struck out with the strength of a madman, but was lifted and half carried, half dragged away.

Suddenly a weird snarling call rang out and those who had grasped me abruptly released their grip. The beast-men were scrambling away in flight, running into the surrounding forest! As I staggered up I saw that they had deserted Jean and me but that those holding Crail and Hunt had dragged them on into the forest. Then the reason for their sudden flight became apparent.

Down from the sky a big flat metal disk was slanting toward us. Upon this great flying-disk crouched a half-score men in white tunics, who were pointing metal nozzles downward as their craft swooped. I saw concentrated jets of clear liquid shooting from these nozzles like water from high-pressure hoses, and as the clear jets struck here and there among the fleeing beast-men they annihilated whichever ones they touched.

With wild yelps of fear the beast-men vanished into the dense surrounding vegetation. So swiftly had it all occurred that in one moment we were all battling to-

gether and in the next the beast-men were gone with Crail and Hunt, and I was staggering to Jean's side. The flying-disk, having routed our attackers, curved swiftly back and slanted down to come to rest on the ground beside us.

The men on it, save two, ran instantly toward us. They were tall and dark-haired men, all armed with smaller nozzle-projectors connected by metal tubing to small belt-tanks.

Their leader was speaking rapidly to us. To our amazement, though his language was wholly unfamiliar we understood his meaning perfectly! Only after a bewildered moment did I comprehend that he was really communicating telepathically with us at the same time that he spoke, flashing his thoughts into our minds and receiving our own thoughts in his. It was not by our spoken words that we understood each other but by our accompanying thoughts.

"Quick, to the flying-disk!" he was telling us. "The beast-men have only been temporarily scattered—there are hordes of them in these forests and they'll be back on us in force any moment!"

"But they've got Rob—and Crail!" cried Jean.

"We can't desert our companions!" I exclaimed.

"You can not help them by staying here to be captured yourself," the other said rapidly. "Come with us—it's your only chance."

"Shall we go with them?" I asked Jean, tortured by doubt. She forced her tears back.

"It's what Rob would want us to do," she declared. "We'll have a chance then to come back and hunt for them."

"But the space-bell!" I exclaimed. "We'll be leaving it here for the beast-men to wreck!"

"We can take your craft with us on the flying-disk," interjected the leader of the strangers. "But quick—we have not a second to lose!"

He shouted an order and as his companions leapt forward we all lifted the space-bell by its lower rim, straining our muscles frantically under its weight and staggering with it toward the flying-disk. We were just stumbling over the disk's low rail when there came a savage roar of snarling shouts from about us, and out from the surrounding forest burst massed hordes of the beast-men.

At once, though, the two men who had remained on the disk swung two of the big nozzles mounted at its edge, and from them twin jets of clear liquid shot toward the onrushing beast-men. As they struck through the mob I glimpsed hairy bodies and vegetation beyond them and even portions of the ground being annihilated wherever the clear liquid struck them.

The jets in an instant swept the clearing free of beast-men, but undeterred by their fate other masses were surging out to attack, a throng of hideous brutes whose savage snarling cries were ear-splitting. By then, though, we had set the space-bell down at the big flying-disk's center. At once the man at its controls clicked over stubby handles, and the disk, with the space-bell upon it, rose sharply into the air. It shot upward and westward over the forest, and in a moment the crushed clearing with its howling beast-men had receded behind us from sight.

BELOW us the forest stretched from horizon to horizon, an ocean of dark-green vegetation that lapped over low hills and shallow valleys. The only breaks in its dense mass were occasional clearings where outcrops of dark or gray metals glinted. The strange scene was lit by the rays of the descending sun, a miniature sun whose smallness and whose thin light more than anything else assured us that we were indeed on Uranus.

Jean was gazing back with quivering chin, and instinctively I put my arm across her shoulders.

"We'll find them, Jean!" I asserted. "We'll get Hunt if we have to search every square mile of this planet!"

"We must," she choked. "To think of him in the hands of those awful creatures——"

The strangers' leader, crouching beside us, shook his head. "Hope not to see your friends again," he advised us. "The Brangas—the beast-men—have captured many Brans thus but never have any of them been seen again."

"The Brans—that is your own race?" I asked, and he nodded.

"It is strange that you do not know that," he said. "Indeed, all about you is strange, yet being humans you must be Brans yourselves."

"We are human but not of your Bran race," I told him. "We are not even of this world, but have come from another world in this craft."

"From another world!" he repeated in awe. "Then in truth you can be neither Bran, Brant nor Branga!"

"We never heard the names until now," I answered.

"They are the three races of this world," he told us. "Long ago we Brans or humans were the one race here, but split gradually into three opposing sects. The first sect were those of our race who worshipped knowledge above all else, who believed that the brain and its powers should be constantly developed and the body neglected. The second sect believed the reverse, that man was an animal and should lead an animal life, developing the size and strength of the body and shunning mental activities as unhealthy. The third sect held those who compromised the two theories, and held the ideal to be a sound mind in a healthy body, without over-emphasizing either.

"Three such sects could not live together, and so a separation took place. The first, who held the brain all-important, went into the far north of our world and there built cities in which they occupied themselves entirely in the acquisition of knowledge. Because of this they evolved in the following ages into Brants or brain-men, great heads or brains with but the tiniest of bodies. These Brants emerge almost never from their cities, and for centuries have had no contact with the rest of our world.

"The second sect, with its ideal of a natural animal life, went into the vast forests of our world to live a healthy animal existence without any of civilization's aids. Letting the brain atrophy but developing the body always, they followed the opposite path of evolution through the ages and became Brangas or beast-men, such as attacked you, brutes with but the merest shred of mind left.

"The third or balanced portion of the race stayed in their cities, and from them we Brans or humans of the present are descended, our dozen cities extending in a belt around this world. Whether the Brants or brain-men still exist in the far north we do not know. But the beast-like Brangas we do know to our cost, for they have become so numerous in these forests between our cities as to defy count, and make communication between our cities only possible by flying-disk. Many times they have dared even to storm our cities, but always our destroying-jets have repelled them with awful slaughter."

"You're heading toward one of your cities now, then?" Jean asked, and the Bran nodded.

"Yes. When we sighted you struggling there we were returning to Bran, our oldest and greatest city, from which our race takes its name. We will reach it soon and there you will be safe with our people. But give up all hope of your companions,

for the Brangas' captives are not ever seen again."

Meanwhile the disk was flying westward with great speed, the wind of its progress buffeting us ceaselessly. The craft's motive mechanism seemed to make use of repellent force-currents for propulsion and was apparently contained entirely inside the thickness of the disk itself, only the projecting handles of its controls being visible. Around the disk's edge were mounted the gray-metal nozzles that projected the deadly destroying-jets, and that were connected to flat tanks of the same metal.

We learned that the gray metal was the one substance on Uranus that could withstand the instantaneous annihilating action of the terrific liquid these people had devised. We learned also, incidentally, that telepathy was the main means of conversation among all on the planet, even the beast-men using it, and that it was only outworn custom that made those conversing speak their thoughts aloud as well.

3

Two hours we sped over the forests before reaching Bran.

Bran, the city, proved to be a mass of drum-shaped buildings of dark metal, enclosed by a towering wall. This wall was faced or plated with the gray metal that was alone proof against the destroying-liquid, and on the rampart's broad top were mounted nozzle-projectors of great size. The wall was separated from the surrounding forests by only a few hundred feet of clear ground.

Some flying-disks were in the air over the city, departing or arriving like ourselves from over the limitless forest-wastes. Through them our own craft sped to come to rest on the immense flat roof of one of the city's taller central buildings. Our space-bell was placed upon the roof, and we were conducted down into the city.

Jean and I found ourselves welcomed with the strongest interest by the white-garbed Brans. They seemed a highly social people, and in fact we learned that though this and their other cities held many tens of thousands of them, they had no rulers and but the slightest skeleton of government, dwelling together without need of more. They were immensely interested in our advent from another world, a feat far beyond their own science.

Their scientific attainments, in fact, were oddly irregular. They had devised the destroying-liquid that was their only weapon, and the flying-disks they used for communication between their cities, and had built their cities of drum-structures with marvelous simplicity and beauty, but aside from these and their achievements in synthetic food creation their scientific attainments were quite limited. They were, as they had said, a balanced race, having been kept from over-emphasizing either mental or physical attainments by the living examples of the Brants and Brangas, the brain-men and beast-men.

They gave Jean and me sympathy enough over the loss of our companions but were as one in declaring that it was useless to search for Hunt and Crail. When we persisted in our resolve, though, they put at our disposal three of their flying-disks, of which they had in fact no great number. With these, manned each by a dozen Brans, we began our search for our companions.

Day after day we flew forth from Bran to search unceasingly over the tangled forests where the two had been captured. But we did not find them, or any trace of them. And more and more it seemed impossible to me that ever we could find them, even if they lived, in that vast waste of dense vegetation into which one could not even see from above, and which was

almost impenetrable to any but the beast-men.

A week passed in this search, and another. The Brans assured us that we might search thus until the end of time without hope of locating even any Brangas, much less their ill-fated captives. I had come to be of the same opinion, but I did not—I could not—express it to Jean. She had become more and more silent as our hunt went on, and I knew that this silence hid an inner anguish at the loss of her brother.

More than two weeks we kept to our search, hoping at least to find some community or gathering-place of the Brangas where a clue as to the fate of Hunt and Crail might be had. But even such we could not find, so well were the beast-men concealed by the denseness of the forests. In fact, in all that time we did not even glimpse a single Branga until the day when our search came to so abrupt and astonishing an end.

That day found us flying a great distance northeast of Bran, our three flying-disks skimming low over the tangled vegetation with Jean and me gazing intently from our craft. We had passed several of the rare clearings in the forest caused by outcroppings of metals, and were just skimming over another such clearing when Jean and I and a half-dozen of those on the other disks cried out together.

A fleeing figure was crossing the clearing below, a running man closely pursued by a score or more of Brangas! The snarling beast-men were close behind the fugitive and all chance of his escaping them was destroyed when he slipped on one of the smooth metal ledges and fell prostrate. Before he could rise the Brangas would have been on him but in the moment that had elapsed our disks had shot low and four or five destroying-jets stabbing down from them had instantly dissolved the Brangas.

Our disks landed, and in a moment a group of us were at the fugitive's side. Before ever I saw his face Jean had glimpsed his dark clothing and had flown to him.

"Rob!" she was crying. "Rob—we've found you!"

"Hunt!" I exclaimed. "But good God, man—what's been happening to you?"

For Hunt's arms bore scars of deep, half-healed wounds, his clothing torn to rags, his face almost ghastly in its whiteness.

"Crail!" he whispered, swaying in the supporting arms of Jean and myself. "Crail and the Brangas! They did this to me and they're moving even now to do worse—they're attacking the Brans!"

"Crail and the beast-men attacking the Brans!" I gasped.

"Yes, Crail and tens of thousands of Brangas are on their way at this moment to storm Bran itself! The beast-men have been preparing under Crail's orders ever since we two were captured. For when they captured us, Crail got into conversation with them telepathically and made them believe that he was an enemy of the Brans and would lead the Brangas to conquest over them.

"He's more than half-mad, Devlin! He learned from the beast-men that Jean and you were at Bran and that's why he's attacking there first; for he swears he'll conquer this world with the beast-men and rule it with Jean at his side. He only spared my life to use me in making Jean yield to him when the time came. When his forces gathered this morning and started for Bran I was left behind with a guard, and made a desperate break for liberty that ended as you saw."

"Then even now Crail and his hordes may be attacking!" I cried, and Hunt nodded heavily.

"Oh, Dev!" exclaimed Jean. "Can we warn the Brans?"

"We can try," I said grimly. "Quick—the disks! If we can get back to Bran in time the attack will not be a surprize one, at least."

In seconds our three flying-disks were curving up at an angle of dizzying steepness to rocket back southwestward over the forest. At their utmost speed they flew; the Brans at their controls having heard and comprehended what Hunt had told us. Hunt himself was half senseless, lying with his head on Jean's arm as we all crouched low together to escape the air-currents that tore across the rushing disk.

The forest-sea rolled back beneath us with unfaltering swiftness, and when we shot at last into sight of Bran's distant metal structures I uttered an exclamation of relief. For the city was as always, a few flying-disks arriving or departing over it, men and women in their white tunics thronging the streets. As we flashed over the forest immediately around the city we could see no sign in it of Crail's beast-men hordes. Either they were hidden by the impenetrable vegetation or had not yet reached the city.

Our three craft shot as one toward the central buildings, to land on the roof beside our space-bell. Hunt seemed unconscious by then, but while Jean and some of those who ran to meet us lifted him, I and the others were racing down into the city to give the alarm. In less than a minute ringing warning signals were arousing the city to its peril.

A chorus of cries arose in which there was more surprize than fear, and through all Bran men raced to the stairs leading to the top of the great enclosing wall. I was among them, buckling on as they were doing the portable belt-tank and nozzle which was their individual weapon. Up to the wall's broad top we poured, men springing to the great nozzle-projectors mounted along it. And as though our appearance was a signal, there burst at the same moment from the forests around the city thousands on tens of thousands of Brangas, a hideous mob of hairy beast-men pressing toward the wall in a single mass!

All around Bran they were bursting forth from the forest's dark depths, their simultaneous savage snarls breaking on our ears like sudden shattering thunder. There stabbed instantly down toward them the terrible destroying-jets of the great nozzles, playing over them like the concentrated streams of so many high-pressure hoses, but with the liquid that annihilated almost all it touched.

But instead of wiping the mass of Brangas instantly from existence as I had seen the destroying-jets do before, they were destroying but a fraction of the beast-men! And I gasped and heard cries of dismay from around me as we saw the reason. The Brangas attacking carried in awkward fashion crudely hammered shields of gray metal, *shields against which the destroying-liquid splashed harmlessly!*

It was Crail's work, I saw instantly. He and none other could have inspired the brute-minded beast-men to gather from outcropping ledges the gray metal that alone was proof against the dread liquid, and to beat that metal into shields that protected them from the jets. For only those who left themselves uncovered were being annihilated by the destroying-jets, and the others were placing tall gray-metal ladders against the wall and swarming up them toward us.

4

BEFORE we recovered from our dismayed astonishment a great number of the Brangas had reached the rampart's broad top, and then began on it a struggle

that surpassed in fierceness anything I had ever experienced.

The Brangas, on reaching the top, sprang with gleaming fangs and talons upon the Brans, who replied with the hissing little jets of their portable tanks-and-nozzles. The wall's top was instantly a scene of terrific carnage, more and more of the beast-men swarming up onto it and more and more surging out of the forest below to the ladders.

How I lived through that mad carnival of death and battle remains yet a mystery to me. As the first Brangas swarmed up from the ladders upon us I pressed the catch of the nozzle I held and as its narrow jet shot into the mass of the beast-men saw hairy bodies annihilated among them as though by exploding areas of nothingness. For many of the Brangas were dropping their shields on reaching the wall's top, and battling only with their natural weapons.

Brans all around me were going down with the fangs of beast-men at their throats. Three Brangas leapt together toward me and the hairy hurtling bodies of two vanished in midair as my jet splashed against them. The talons of the third raked my cheek as I dodged sidewise, but as I whirled, that remaining one of my attackers was gone too as a jet struck him. Brans were annihilated on all sides of me, also, by their own jets splashing back from gray-metal shield or wall upon them.

The terrific battle came to its climax. The beast-men still were swarming up onto the wall, and though the flying-disks of the Brans were hovering over their masses and playing jets on them, these were too few in number to affect the struggle's course. Ever more Brangas were reaching the rampart's top, content often in their beast-like ferocity to grasp Brans and leap to death with them from the wall. Ever more masses of them were surging out of the forest around all the city.

It seemed that the Brangas were breaking through, that moments more would see them streaming in their thousands into the city. We would no sooner sweep them from the wall's top than they were replaced by others from the hordes below. I think indeed that they would have broken through inside of minutes had not some of the Brans had the inspiration to turn the death-jets of the great nozzles straight upward and outward a little into the air.

For the destroying-jets, shooting up to a great height, fell down as a streaming rain of annihilating liquid upon the Brangas' hordes below. They were holding their shields before them and thus were vulnerable to this unexpected rain of death from above. Before they could realize what was happening thousands of them were mowed from existence by this death-rain around the city. The survivors were running back in sudden fear toward the forest.

Shouting wildly, the Brans now pressed the beast-men on the wall's top. They were outnumbered now but resisted us with brute-like savageness as they reached and retreated down their ladders. Many of the ladders we toppled over, to crush those upon them and others in the fear-stricken masses below. As we pressed one of the last groups of them thus to the wall's edge I saw among the Brangas a tall figure retreating with them, behind his gray shield. I sprang forward with a shout as I saw that it was Crail!

He had led the Branga hordes up to the wall's top at that point and now was retreating with them. I leapt forward and the jet from my nozzle hissed through the wild ruck of battle toward him. But fate had made him glimpse me as I sprang, and his shield jerked over in time to stop the deadly jet. He himself carried a

tank-and-nozzle, procured perhaps from some Branga store of loot, and his own jet darting back took me by surprize and would have finished me had I not stumbled at that moment on a body and fallen, the jet passing over me.

When I regained my feet Crail and his beast-men followers were gone, sliding down the ladder. I glimpsed him below, shouting to the Brangas as he led them back into the forest. Our jets continued to rain and play among them as long as any beast-men were in sight below, and it was not many moments before their immense hordes, still protecting themselves with the shields, had vanished into the dense vegetation.

We survivors stood panting amid the strewn dead on the wall's top, shaken by that terrific attack. Inside the wall the city of Bran resounded with cries of panic, for never before had the Brangas won up to the wall as their shields had now enabled them to do. And foreboding was on us all, for all could see that another such attack of the beast-men would break through and that once they were inside the city, Bran and its people would be the defenseless prey of the hairy hordes. The red sun sinking in the west seemed blood-like, ominous.

THAT night, while the Bran forces watched and waited on the wall for another attack, a desperate little council was held in one of the central buildings. Hunt and Jean and I were of it, and a half-dozen of the leaders of the Brans.

Hunt, white-faced and still too weak almost to stand, gave warning. "Crail will surely attack again and the Brangas will follow him blindly, for he has shown them that with the shields they can meet the Brans on even terms."

"But the trick of turning the destroying-jets upward!" I exclaimed. "It broke them today—drove them back."

"They'll be prepared for it next time," Hunt said. "Crail will be showing them now how to meet it, and when he leads them to the attack again, tonight or tomorrow, they'll surely break through."

"It is so," said one of the Brans somberly. "Our tanks of destroying-liquid were nearly emptied by the unprecedented fighting today, our fighting-forces were halved, and the next attack of the Branga hordes out there means a break through and death for us all."

"Yet you three could escape in your space-bell—back to your own world," suggested another Bran.

Hunt shook his head, as did Jean and I. "Aside from the fact that I, who alone of us can operate it, am too weak now to do so, none of us would consider it. We are not likely to desert in your hour of greatest peril you who saved us, the more so as it was we who brought that peril on you in bringing Crail to this world."

"But isn't there anything we can do but wait for the Branga attack?" Jean asked. "Couldn't we get help from somewhere —from your other cities?"

"Impossible," a Bran told us. "There are not enough flying-disks in all our cities to carry here a tenth of the forces that would be needed to repel the coming attack. There's no hope of help for us from the other cities."

"But there's a chance to get help elsewhere!" I exclaimed.

They stared. "Elsewhere?"

"The Brants!" I cried. "The brain-men you told us of—surely they'd have the power to beat back the Brangas!"

"They would have the power if they still exist," said the Bran slowly, "but we know not even whether they do yet exist. And even if they do and knew of our plight they would not come to our aid—their cold unhuman minds are foreign to all such emotions as kindness or pity."

"Yet if we could reach them it would be at least a chance," I insisted.

"It would that!" Hunt exclaimed. "Devlin's right—it's a long chance, yet a real one!"

"But who would go on this mad quest for the Brants at this moment when our city totters on the brink of ruin?" asked a Bran.

"I will!" I answered. "Give me a flying-disk and two or three men and I'll start north within the hour. You have some idea at least of where lies the land of the Brants?"

"The Brants' country is believed to lie due north from this city, half-way between it and our world's northern pole," the Bran answered. "A swift flying-disk would take you there in eight hours and if you were fortunate enough to find them and get them to return with you, you might be back tomorrow before the Brangas attack. It is a mad chance—yet as your friend has said it is a real one."

"Then as soon as the disk is ready I start!" I cried.

With feverish haste the necessary preparations were made. One of the swiftest of the flying-disks was got into commission on the building's top, its motive-mechanism and jet-weapons hurriedly inspected. Three Brans skilled in the operation of the disks were to accompany me, and besides the disk's nozzles we would each wear, of course, one of the portable tanks-and-nozzles.

When I emerged with the others onto the roof I found the three men waiting for me on the disk, which rested beside the gleaming metal shape of our space-bell. Bran, the city, lay wrapped in night about us, and in fear. There were few lights across it save the white flares on the wall by which the watching Brans guarded against a surprize night attack. The limitless forests about the city lay dark and silent, holding within them the beast-hordes that Crail would soon loose again upon the city.

Our little group was silent as I paused beside the disk. Hunt wrung my hand hard and walked aside as though to stare out over the city. The Bran leaders spoke but a few words to me, yet I sensed their feelings in seeing me start thus at this, their city's darkest hour. I turned awkwardly to Jean, half extending a hand, but she ignored it. She simply came into my arms, and for a moment I held her close, unspeaking and unmoving. Then I turned abruptly from her, was on the disk, was soaring steeply upward. . . .

The roof — the whole Bran city — dwindled and disappeared swiftly in the enveloping darkness as we shot higher. Only its scattered lights showed, and they quickly vanished as we flashed northward.

It was like a flight in a dream, that swift and steady rush through the night. Beneath was only blackness, that hid from us the forests and Crail's beast-men hordes in them as we flew over them. We four were crouching low on the disk, breathing with difficulty in the terrific wind of our speed, one of the Brans having the controls. Overhead there were but the pin-pricks of the stars until there rose at the eastern horizon to light the night two of Uranus' four moons.

So beneath its moons we drove north over Uranus until dawn came. It came as an upwelling of gray light to our right that changed to thin gold and disclosed the familiar tangled, endless forests stretching away on all sides below. For hours we had been flying, and my rough calculations told me that we should be near the legended land of the Brants. Yet below was no sign of anything but forest.

I ordered our speed reduced and we kept a careful lookout as we sped on-

ward. More than once we circled back to investigate something we had glimpsed, but only to find in each case that it was but one of the metal scarps or clearings in the forest. The three Brans were becoming rapidly discouraged and I felt my own hope waning, when without warning there shot into view ahead six flying-craft rushing toward us!

They seemed quite small, and before we recovered from our surprize they had reached us, curving like lightning in midair to swarm about us. I gasped. Each craft was a flat metal one much like our flying-disk in design save that it was square in shape and not more than three feet in length each side. They were individual flying-squares, and upon each was a squat figure we only glimpsed.

As they soared in midair around us I saw the figures on them raising metal tubes toward us, and with abrupt fear I shouted.

"Head upward!" I cried to the Bran at our disk's controls. "They're training weapons of some sort on us—get away from them!"

"I can't!" cried the Bran, turning terror-stricken eyes to me.

"Can't?" I shouted. "Why not?"

"Something's the matter with me!" he cried. "I can't control my own arms or body—it's as though some other brain were controlling it!"

"I'll take the disk's controls, then!" I exclaimed, leaping toward them.

But half-way to them I stopped, and wholly against my own conscious will I returned to crouch where I had been! The other Brans, who had made the same motion, did the same, uttering inarticulate cries.

The horror of it swept me. Our brains, though as conscious and alert as ever, could no longer control our bodies, that seemed to respond to wholly foreign commands!

"Good God!" I cried. "Those creatures' metal tubes—they have the power to supplant our own wills with theirs—to dictate the actions of our own bodies!"

5

A COLD sweat had broken out on my forehead. It was perhaps as ghastly a situation as ever man was in, to have one's brain or mind remain conscious yet powerless while another mind directed one's body. And the Bran at the controls of our disk was now, like some automaton controlled from a distance, keeping our craft level with the six flying squares and racing on among them.

Grouped thus strangely together, our craft and the strange ones raced at top speed northwestward. Beyond the forests there came soon into sight a city, as great as Bran and constructed like it of drum-shaped metal buildings. But the buildings were lower and broader, and there was no enclosing wall or protecting weapons around them.

We dipped steeply toward this city, our Bran pilot's eyes wild as his hands operated our disk against his will. Our craft landed in a broad street and at once we four, without volition of our own, sprang from it and stood rigid. The six little square flyers that had captured us so strangely shot down beside us, hovered a foot or two above the street's surface around us.

Upon each of them was a creature stranger than any I had yet seen. Each was simply a great bulbous and hairless white head, a yard in diameter. The only features in it were the two eyes, near its base, and the tiny mouth-opening below them. The huge head or brain-case was supported by two tiny limbs not more than a foot in length, and similar little arms branched from just above them.

Four of the creatures held metal tubes directed toward us four.

"The Brants—the brain-men!" I cried. "The race we've been searching for!"

"We are Brants, yes," said the foremost of the creatures in a thin, reedy voice. "I read from your mind that you come with these three on a mission regarding the Brans."

"We do, and it's one of utmost importance!" I said.

"We proceed now toward those who will hear you," the Brant said, calmly. "Make no rash movements—they would be useless, for we can control you instantly again with our thought-tubes."

"Thought-tubes!"

"These tubes you see," he answered. "The Brans and even the Brangas are able to exchange thoughts in conversation. But we Brants have gone farther and can use these tubes and their contained mechanisms as transformers or projectors by which our enormous brain-power takes possession of your own brains' motor-nerve centers and directs your bodies at our will. If I commanded you through the thought-tube to strangle yourself you would do it immediately."

The six Brants, on their individual little flyers, moved forward on either side of us as we four marched rapidly along the street. The Brant city had an empty look to our eyes. Only a few brain-men came and went in its streets, all unnecessary movement evidently being avoided by them. And every brain-man we saw moved upon his little individual flying-square, their atrophied little bodies apparently incapable of the exertion of walking.

We passed buildings whose open doors gave us glimpses of wonder. Some of them held machinery unlike anything I had ever seen, mighty mechanisms all controlled by one Brant sitting at an unthinkably intricate switchboard. In another, metal arms seemed carrying out simultaneously innumerable scientific investigations and experiments, all controlled by another brain-man. In still another were flat metal plates from which rose dazzling cones of violet light or force, a half-dozen Brants hovering around them on their flyers in incalculable activities.

All was as static as possible in the city, with no social throngs or places of commerce. It was truly a city of brain-men, one in which knowledge and the acquisition of knowledge were alone held to be of importance.

We moved with our accompanying Brants into a building, and down a broad, low-ceilinged corridor. There were rooms on either side in which brain-men sat motionless on their flying-squares, in thought or sleep. And there were other rooms in which were Brants whose heads or brains seemed connected electrically to tall machines, whether for the recording of thought-knowledge or for its acquisition it was impossible to guess.

Then we emerged from the corridor into a large central hall. It was in a soothing semi-dusk, but I could see that around its edge sat upon their flying-squares a full fifty Brants. They all seemed larger than any we had yet seen, great brain-men who were in truth almost bodiless brains, and without need of telling I knew we were in the presence of the greatest of this city's Brants.

WE HALTED with the watchful six about us at the hall's center, and instantly one of the Brants seated at the room's edge spoke to me.

"Your coming has been awaited since our automatic recorders signalled your approach," he said. "I read from your mind that you are from another world, but that you come with these three to seek

aid from us to save the Brans' city from the Brangas."

"It is so," I said. "You alone can save the Brans from the beast-men hordes, if they have not already been attacked and overcome."

"The quarrels of the Brans and the Brangas mean little to us," the brain-man answered. "The Brangas are but beasts and the Brans are only midway between them and ourselves. Only we Brants have forged ahead through the ages toward our ideal of pure, bodiless mind, and in our unceasing search for knowledge the wars of this world are of no import to us."

"But surely you'll give some help!" I exclaimed. "From pity alone you can't see the Brans, a human race, overpowered by those brutes!"

"I comprehend what you mean by pity but it is a thing unknown to us," the Brant said. "Long ago we Brants weeded from our minds all those irrational emotions which tend to warp the brain's workings, and we have been so successful that we can not feel pity or friendship or gratitude any more than a stone could."

"Then you won't help!" I cried.

"On the contrary we will help," the Brant said surprizingly, "but only from rational motives. I have read from your mind that one who came with you from your world now leads the Brangas and has given them new weapons and powers. If under him they overcome the Brans they will come against us also in time, and while we could repel them then it will be easier to crush them now. The order has already been given, in fact, and some three thousand Brants are now assembling over this city on their flying-squares to start south with you."

"But they'll have weapons?"

"They will have the thought-tubes," he answered. "From your own experience of them you should know how effective they are."

Our next minutes in the Brant city remain to me now a confused memory, so swift was the course of events. We emerged from the central hall to find Brants pouring up from every quarter of the city, each upon his individual flyer, to mass overhead. We regained our own flying-disk and shot up to join the gathering swarm.

It was a stupendous scene, that rising of the Brant thousands from their city. Like parts of some giant mechanism they moved up to take their place in the mass, silently forming regular files and columns until at last all hung motionless over the city. Then, without spoken command, all soared southward.

If our flight northward had been desperate, our return flight now was terrific. The forests spun by beneath us like some immense panorama unrolling at lightning speed. And our disk, riding at the van of the onrushing swarm, was whirled onward at such speed by the flying-squares around it that we were more than once almost torn from it by the thundering winds. Like a meteor-swarm our strange fleet split the air.

The Brants about us, crouching low on their little flyers, seemed as cool and unconcerned as though we were but casually testing our speed. But in my own brain there beat like a hammer of doom the agonizing doubt as to whether Crail and the beast-men had yet attacked Bran. Of Jean I tried not to think. The face and name that spun in my mind were those of Crail.

The sun crossed the zenith as we flew. I knew that we were nearing Bran and tenseness that almost choked me had me by the throat. Raising myself a little against the winds that beat upon us, I stared ahead, that single doubting thought still hammering in my brain. Bran came

into sight far ahead, a dark patch against the dark-green forest.

The moments then in which we drove toward it were of killing tenseness. As we drew closer I saw Brangas in tens of thousands swarming again outside the city's wall, masses of them climbing the ladders and covering the rampart's top, thousands of them *swarming over the wall and into the city! Bran had fallen!* The city held surging hordes of beast-men who had carried all before them and had pressed the Brans back to their last refuge, the roofs of their buildings!

"Too late!" screamed a Bran beside me. "They've taken the city!"

"There's a chance left yet!" I yelled hoarsely. "Down to the attack!"

My command was unheard, unheeded. As one the three thousand Brants were diving with us upon the city!

As we drove headlong down, the roofs rushed into closer view, crowded with struggling Brans and Brangas. The beast-men were winning up to the roofs and fearful slaughter was going on, the hissing death-jets of the Brans eating areas of nothingness that were refilled by up-surging beast-men. Then the Brant thousands on their flyers had reached the roofs, hovering a few feet above them.

For a moment, so awful was the struggle going on, the Brants were not noticed. But the brain-men now were pointing their thought-tubes downward, and instantly there took place a horror beside which the battle until then was as nothing. The beast-men began a wholesale suicide! Some tore their own throats out with their talons, others broke their own necks with sudden wrenches, still others leapt from the roofs in thousands to crash to death in the streets below.

The Brangas, their bodies controlled by the thought-tubes of the Brants, were killing themselves at the brain-men's will!

It was horror unthinkable, yet even that horror could not stay me as our disk shot toward the roof where I had taken leave of Hunt and Jean. It was crowded still with struggling Brans and Brangas, and as our disk crashed down among them I was leaping forth with my three followers, our death-jets hissing forth at the beast-men who sprang at us. For the moment all else in our minds was drowned by the mad mélange of battle raging about us.

Brans, Brants and Brangas were mixed here and across all the city's roofs in a climax of conflict. Mad snarls of the beast-men, high shouts of the Brans, flashing talons and hissing death-jets and silent thought-tubes that wrought horrible death—all shifted and spun about us. The Brangas were seeking to flee now from the dread attack of the Brants, and across all the city and outside its walls the brain-men were swooping low to wreak death among them.

Like one mad I fought through the whirling ruck of battle toward the great roof's center, Brants behind and above me wielding the terrible tubes, my nozzle stabbing its last jet ahead. The battle was breaking, the Brangas or what was left of them attempting panic flight. Crazy cries of triumph were rising from the Brans on the roofs, but my whole thought was for Jean and insanely I fought forward in search of her.

Out of the wild confusion a frantic hand plucked me, that of a white-faced man staggering up by me.

"Hunt!" I yelled. He was shouting hoarsely, pointing.

"Crail—with Jean!" he was crying. "The space-bell——"

I glanced, and the blood froze about my heart. At the roof's center Crail was dragging Jean through the open door of the space-bell, that still rested there!

In the split-second I saw, I understood.

Crail knew his Branga hordes were shattered and destroyed and he was taking Jean with him in his one chance of escape from us and from Uranus!

With a cry I leapt toward them through the mad whirl of friend and foe. Hairy Brangas rose before me but I clubbed the nozzle in my hand and broke through them. Crail had thrust Jean inside the space-bell and was reaching to close its door. I threw myself forward in a last leap, my shoulder coming between door and frame. He knew me, and with face unhuman and an animal-like yell strove to knock me backward. But I had grasped him.

We reeled in a death-grip. About us the din of battle was dying, the Brangas inside the city slain and those who survived outside in mad flight. I heard the cries of Jean and Hunt, felt Crail's hands closing on my throat. I pushed upward against his chin but there was a roaring in my ears as his throttling grip tightened. The roaring was deafening, lights spun before my eyes as he choked me, but I held to him, pushed with the last of my strength. As though from a great distance I heard a dull snap, Crail's grip relaxed, and he tumbled dead at my feet.

I staggered back, into Jean's supporting arms. The battle was over. Branga dead lay thick in and around Bran, but no living beast-man was in sight in the city or outside it.

The Brans upon the city's roofs were shouting hoarsely, in their gladness and their gratitude, but the Brants were not heeding them. The brain-men had accomplished their mission, and gratitude meant nothing to them. The Brant thousands rushed up and together, hung for a moment in a cloud-like mass over the city, and then were moving swiftly north, vanishing in moments. Still the Brans were shouting, my name now, but Jean and I were not listening to them or to Hunt's hoarse voice beside us. We were clinging to each other, oblivious for the moment to all the tumult around us.

6

Less than a week later we too took leave of the Brans, and of Uranus. Hunt's strength had returned, and he was as earth-sick as Jean and myself. The Brans, understanding, did not press us to stay. They did not even try to express to us their gratitude for the breaking forever of the Branga menace. But on the sunlit morning we entered our space-bell, all their thousands were on the city's roofs and wall to watch us go.

Jean and I could see through the bell's window-ports those silent masses, and Hunt turned too, his hand at the control-panel, for a glance. Then the lever in his hand clicked down, with a stunning roar the sunlit scene outside vanished, and we were hurled again into unconsciousness.

From that unconsciousness we emerged almost together, Jean's anxious voice in my ears and Hunt rising beside me. It was night now around the space-bell and impatiently we opened its door and burst forth. We were standing beneath the stars in an open field, the lights of a farm twinkling in the distance. Where we were we had no means of knowing, but a feeling of safeness unutterable held us. It was earth, and that was enough.

Hunt was looking toward the stars, as I stood with Jean.

"Uranus—and we three stood on it minutes ago," he was saying, half to himself. "A habitable planet, yes—and a terror planet."

"A terror planet! For what did we find there but terror and battle and death——"

"More than that, Hunt," I told him. "I found more than that."

And I drew Jean closer to me.

The Last Magician

By DAVID H. KELLER

A thrilling fantasy about a monster so vast that forests grew upon its back and people dwelt unsuspecting in towns upon its hide

"THEY are all dead, Master!"

Even as he moaned these words the weary man fell unconscious at the gate of Castle Doom. The old man looked down at the bleeding feet and mutilated arm, and then, with a great effort that taxed all his strength, he carried the body of his favorite pupil into the Castle: but, once within, he paused to bar the gate.

It was a week before the injured man could talk, and even then he was advised to rest and not torture himself with the telling of his tale. Finally the eagerness of youth and the curiosity of age could no longer brook delay, and the Master announced that the time was ripe for the story of what had happened in Astrobella.

The two men, ninety-year-old Master and thirty-year-old pupil, slowly mounted the stone steps that wound their way to the upper tower. There, on the stone battlement, soft-covered with moss, they made themselves at ease. Far below them the waves of Mare Nostrum beat ceaselessly against their old enemies, the piled-up rocks. It was a continuous battle in the narrow channel between the waters from Lac Aranguiz going out and the waves from the sea coming in. Spray dashed a hundred feet in the air to pleasure the sea-gulls. In that spray the sunshine prismed into a rainbow of mystery. To the south and west the fair land of Astrobella lay, covered in the purple mist of enchanted distance. The young man never could cease from the wonder and beauty of it. Even now he sat quiet under its mysterious lure.

At last the aged man woke the daydreamer from his fantasies. The young man looked around him and shivered at the reality of life. The master worried to see his enlarging pupils and the tremor of his wasted hand.

"Tell me what happened to you—and the Brothers in Astrobella?" the old man asked; and the answer came:

"Must I tell all?" and the command was:

"All! For only thus can you find peace."

Then like a breath from the Pit came the blistering tale.

"You recall, Master, that you always taught us that our magic must be White Magic and never be used to work evil or for a selfish end. You sent us into Astrobella, years ago, with that command, and we prospered through your teachings; and, because of us, the land blossomed like a Persian garden. At St. Paulos and Valencia and Melaga the twenty-one of us prospered in a firm brotherhood. The ships that we owned sailed Mare Nostrum, while our caravans crossed the Sierra Darro and brought back copper, tin and amber from Terra Incognita.

"But you know all this. Each month one of us came to report and receive your advice and bring our gifts, not of tribute, but of love. You know everything we have done in these years. We became

"Suddenly it raised in the air, passed in a graceful curve, and disappeared in the waters of Mare Nostrum."

prosperous—nay, even wealthy, but it was all due to your teachings, Master, and the White Magic we learned at your feet.

"We knew that the merchants envied us, but we never realized the extent of the hatred held against us by the King and his barons. Their ways were not our ways. We believed in peace, freedom and brotherly love, while they never seemed happy unless they were warring or wenching. There was no charge they could bring against us, for we were good citizens, paid our taxes and walked uprightly.

"Finally the King sought out the Cardinal, him who ruled in the Cathedral at St. Paulos. He was a grasping man, always scratching the inside of his hand. This Cardinal advised that we be tried

as evil-doers, sorcerers, heretics and magicians, workers in deviltry and Black Magic. We were to be found guilty and killed and all our property confiscated, half for the King and the rest for the Cathedral—and that really meant the Cardinal.

"Our enemies worked secretly and so well that on the day appointed they caught us all. Lacking warning, we had no thoughts of escape. By night the twenty-one brothers, with their wives and families, were in the dungeons. Everything we had was taken from us—our houses, goods and ships. Seven of our little ones died of hunger in the next week while we awaited trial. That was a wonderful good fortune for them.

"The trial? Why, it was no real trial, Master, just a hideous farce. We were charged with every known crime. They said we drank the blood of children, consorted with the Devil, attended a strange thing they called the Black Mass, worked desperately against the good of the country. Of course, we were declared guilty—we were not even allowed to defend ourselves—Giles was killed in the court because he asked permission to speak in our defense. Still, he said some words even as he died—you would have been proud of little Giles had you seen him that day—always so timid, but then he cursed the Bishop and the King and the Cardinal and all the Unholy Band, and even as he died he told them of a monster that would destroy the land. Doubtless he raved in his death agony, but it was a brave sight to see him dare tell such things to the King, even as he bled to death.

"Giles' wife was there and heard all he said, and as he quieted in death she turned to me and whispered, 'That is the kind of a brave man I married!' and, with a dagger snatched from a soldier's belt, she killed herself, but she kissed her poor man ere she died.

"They all died. By fire and steel and drowning they died, and only I remain of all those fair young men you taught your wisdom to. They were going to cut me up piecemeal, and there they made their mistake. First, they killed my wife—she was with child—then they cut off my left hand. At that I departed from your teaching and used Black Magic."

"You never learned such magic from me!" interrupted the old man, surprized that such a thing had happened.

"No—I learned it not from you: but I know some. My ships had brought me manuscripts from Araby and mystery books from the far East. I read them and pondered over them, but I never tried to use the wisdom I learned from them. I never needed it, but when I saw my wife die, I called on Asmodeus for help—you know of him, the Devil with two sticks?"

"A wild fiend from Hell," commented the Master, gravely.

"Wild he was that day. He came in a storm that blew the cross off the Cathedral. The day darkened into night. The blood-stained bodies of our loved ones were washed clean by the torrents of rain and lay in the square, bleached and free from stain or pain. Hail, the size of your fist, drove the soldiers to shelter and I was carried through the air into the Dark Forest.

"Slowly, through the mountain passes and along the river, I made my way to you and Castle Doom. There is nothing more for me to tell you—that is what happened. We will spare the telling of details—imagine the worst and that will tell you what happened."

The grief-stricken man looked silently to the east over the desolate sea. Two pigeons started to build their nests among the rocks. The Master Magician sighed.

"The work of years destroyed in one day," he whispered. "Nothing remains to repay the effort of years."

"There is still revenge!" replied the sick man.

"An evil word, my dear lad."

"But a necessary one. Shall such evil go unrewarded?"

"I have lived a long time," replied the Magician. "In fact, I am now over ninety years old. In these years I have learned much. Here is some of my wisdom: 'One swallow does not make a summer.' 'What goes up in the air must come down.' 'It is a long lane that has no turning.' 'Two and two make four.' What think you of such wisdom?"

The young man looked at his Master but kept silent.

"What think you?" repeated the Magician.

"I dare not tell you."

"Nay, Marcus, speak thy mind. Only you and I are left and certainly we can be frank with each other. Say your say. Why should you fear me?"

"I fear to hurt your pride."

"That is something I never had—not as you mean it—so, speak your mind freely."

"Then I would say this. It was not *your* wife and unborn child who were killed in the square at St. Paulos, and if my tale stirs you not to revenge, then you are growing old and childish." The young man spoke rapidly as though forced to finish at once ere he was stopped by regret and love for his Master: but the aged Magician only smiled.

"That was the speech of youth and not of age. Long before you were born I also had a wife. Just sixty years ago we lived in St. Paulos. I was away for a month, and during that time she was burned as a witch, and when I came back to Astrobella there was nothing left—even her ashes had been scattered over Mare Nostrum. I came here and had this Castle built—only I know of the building by unseen hands—the cheeping voices directing the construction.

"After it was built I pondered over the Wherefore and the Why of life and then I determined to return good for evil and bless the land that had cursed me. I studied and learned many things and then I gathered you boys and made a Brotherhood of Twenty-one. You learned all that was needed to make a land prosperous, and each became an expert in his art, profession or trade. Then I sent you out to make Astrobella blossom into an earthly paradise. Now, at ninety years of age, this is my reward. You alone are left to me, Marcus, I tell you; it is time for me to think seriously about these matters and not decide lightly what to do. I must meditate, but when I finish, you will find that I am neither fatally old, childish nor have I forgotten my wife—or yours! Now help me to my room—and let me sleep—do not disturb me—no matter how long I slumber, respect my resting. When I am ready, I will send for you. In the time you wait for me, rest and eat and sleep. Grow strong, for you will need that sleep and rest and strength in days to come. If you can not slumber, drink Wine of Poppy. You will find it in the storeroom."

DOWN the winding steps of ancient stone they went slowly, and there, into the Magician's room, they came to put him to sleep. He had a couch of ebony, inlaid with gold and ivory, and on it was a white silken bag, full of swan's down, to serve as a buffer between his bones and the hardness of the bed. On this he lay, and, folding his hands across his breast, he sighed and shut his eyes. Marcus took a black silk coverlet, emblazoned with stars of silver, and cov-

ered his Master. Then he left, wondering at the Magician's peaceful face and white hairs—and ere he reached the door the old man was asleep.

Marcus stood at the doorway, watching the old man, then walked slowly to the storeroom in the cellar, lighted with torches that never burned shorter. There was Wine of Poppy in a flask of yellow crystal, the stopper of which was shaped like the seed pod of the *Papaver Orientalis*. From this flask he poured what he knew was necessary and drank it slowly. Later on in his own room he joined his Master in repose, and, as he slept, no dreams of terror came to torment him in his rest: but in a garden of lilies his sweet lady and he walked, while she told him of the deep-tasted joys of Paradise: Around them ran a little child in a white shirt, bordered with purple, and on the breast thereof the name "Joy" embroidered. He judged that the child was the one unborn on earth, and his wife's pride at the baby's sturdy ways confirmed this thought—but he dared not ask her the truth of it. . . .

Thus, when he awoke on the morrow, he was healed of part of his hurt and went down and battled in the waves as he had done so often in his youth.

From the small bathing-beach he looked up to the Castle, five hundred feet above him, cunningly built on the overhanging crest of a mountain crag. Once again he wondered at the skill of the building and of the wonderful magic that had kept it concealed all these sixty years so that none had seen it or come to it in all the days save only those welcomed by the Master Magician. He and the Brotherhood had spent happy months there.

THREE days later, as he slept after bathing, a martlet awakened him by insistent fluttering of wings on closed eyes. So Marcus knew that the old man had roused from his sleep and was calling for him. Dressing carefully, he joined the Magician in the library. As they sat there facing each other in their cushioned chairs, Marcus marveled to see his Master's hands gently stroke the chair arms, made out of the tusks of the African elephant. For the hands were youthful and strong and the eyes were wild and fired with the joy of early manhood, but the rest of the body was wasted and worn.

As though reading his pupil's thoughts the Magician said, "To solve the problem ahead of me I had to have clear vision, and to do the work my hands had to be strong and cunning. So, during my sleep, I willed that strength from me should flow to these parts. Thus you see them enriched at the expense of the rest of me.

"To me in my dreams came what I sought for. There came to me out of the past the answer to my questionings and here is what we will do—I, while I live, and you to finish when I am gone; for the ending may be delayed many years—it would be a shame to hasten it. Now, listen and tell me if my mind is as old as you thought.

"A long time ago there were animals in this land. No one knows how large they were, how many, or the size of them. Most of them must have died: or, perhaps, they still live at the bottom of the Mare Nostrum. We have tales of such monsters, told by sailors in the old books. You can read of such fancies in the manuscripts in these very rooms. There is a tale of a vessel landing on an island. The sailors went ashore and raised a crop of wheat and filled the vessel with coconuts and rice and sweet water. Then, one way or another, as they prepared to sail, the island moved away, and they knew it then for what it really was—a giant turtle, and what they thought was an island was only part of its back stick-

ing out of the water. The large animal had slept there for years, wondering dully what to do next, while trees grew upon its back.

"They must have been marvelously big animals with little minds, wandering about the world as they vainly tried to reason the real meaning of their own existence. Finally they disappeared, or so we think, though they may still live in some land unknown to our voyagers. Lesser animals came after that—veritable ants in comparison, but, even so, over one hundred paces long. Their bones whiten the desert spots of the earth, while the imprints of their feet and toes, two paces long, cause men to puzzle over the mysteries of the past. These, too, have gone. Such animals were too dull to defend themselves, too clumsy to procreate, too big to live. When they passed out of the picture, our ancestors, my dear lad, timidly came down from the tree tops, and man appeared on earth.

"It was the age of little animals, the saber-toothed tiger, cave bear and mammoth. Man fought them and finally conquered, not by strength, but by the power of his mind. It was the beginning of Magic. Always there has existed this wonderful force. How did it come and from where? How shall I tell? One man in a lifetime learned a trifle and he taught what he knew to a younger man, who added a trifle to it and taught it in turn to a third. It must have taken thousands of years! At first there was no word-writing, only pictures, and before pictures there was a language, but only of grunts. In every generation there were wise men, a few, and stupid men, many. The wise men grew to know more, but the stupid men seemed to grow more base. Else, why do they kill as they did the other day at St. Paulos?

"The wise men either became Magicians or Priests. If they lived only for the joy of learning and were never satisfied unless they had their noses between the leaves of a musty book, they became workers of Magic: but if they loved power and wealth and were greedy and selfish, then they became Priests and lived upon the ignorance and stupidity of the commoners. They became powerful, and, as they did so, they tried hard to exterminate the bookworms, as they called the Magicians.

"They made a good job of it, Marcus. Try as hard as we could, it was difficult to survive. Yonder is a book bound in black leather with clasps of gold. It has a thousand pages written in ink by my own hand, and the ink is red and the pages spotted with tears. Each page tells the death of a Magician, friend of mine, at the hands of these Priests. I am the last one left in these parts and you are the last pupil. There are some of the old Brotherhood in the Deserts of Arabia and a few more in a place you wot not of, called the Mountains of Gobi.

"They live on there, but they dare not show their faces in the civilized parts of earth lest they be hunted and killed like wild animals.

"Yet our wisdom helped in past ages, and only through our aid did man win in his fight against the wild creatures, who constantly tried to kill him. Were it not for our magic, there would be no human race on the ground: we would still share the tree tops with the apes.

"To prove this to you, I will tell you what these Magicians did over in Hispania, far beyond the mountains. There were bears there, large savages, that seemed to live only for the pleasure of tearing man to pieces. Primitive man had to live in caves. He had to select caves with little openings, too small for the bears to crawl through, but large enough for the man. Outside, the bears would watch till finally their enemies were

driven out by cold and hunger and darkness. The savages would rush out with their stone spears and flint axes and finally a bear would be killed, but more men than bears died in the fight. It was a sorry way to live and die for our ancestors.

"Then the Magicians began to study and see what could be done. When a bear was killed, they watched it as it was cut up, and thus they found that the heart was the life of him. When their weapons reached the heart, the bear began to die slowly but surely. Then in their innermost caves they began to experiment. They took clay and fashioned a bear, a large bear ten feet long. When they finished, it looked a little like a real bear. They put teeth in the open mouth and patches of hair over the curving flanks. No doubt, the image scared the dull ones, who thought it was alive.

"After that they brought the hunters in and showed them how to fight the bear. The wise men, too feeble to fight, showed the dull strong men the proper place to thrust their spears so that they would always reach the heart. They had a school in which the hunters took turns in rushing up to the bear and spearing it while the Magicians held torches and sang hymns and one of them back of the bear made horrible bear noises.

"Year after year they performed this magic, and every year it became easier to kill the bears. A skilful hunter could kill a bear by himself if he was expert enough. What was more wonderful was the fact that the bears died without waiting to be killed. The Magicians would hold a class of instruction for bear-hunters and the next morning a dead bear would be found near the cave—no holes in its hide, but the heart torn open.

"At last all the bears were killed and the men were able to come out of the caves and stay out. Huts and houses were now homes instead of caves. The common people forgot. They never could remember about the past, but the Magicians had added one more fact to their ever growing store of knowledge.

"I know all this is true. When I was but a lad my Master told me the tale and made me read about it in the old books. Wanting to know for sure whether it was true, I went there, and over in Hispania I found the caves that those bear-hunters used to live in. The clay bears were still there, with the spear holes in their sides where the hunters had stabbed them. The hunters used red clay to represent blood. It was clever, the way those men had made the bears. One had a real skull for the head. I brought back some of the bear teeth but later on lost them.

"That trip showed me the truth of the old stories. The bears were actually killed by the power of the Magicians. It is true that the Magicians taught the hunters where to stab, but there was something greater than just that education. Some of those bears died without being touched by the spears, yet their hearts were torn open. How did that happen?

"It was magic, Marcus, magic! I do not know why it happened, but it did and it still does. The old Magicians discovered it by accident; the following generations developed it and profited therefrom. In the hands of the unscrupulous it became Black Magic of the most horrible kind. This is the way it was used. You can see at once how terrible it was, used in the wrong way by the wrong person.

"Let us imagine a Magician who has developed a hatred of some important person, such as a King or a Baron. All the Magician has to do is to take wax and make a doll, shaped like his enemy. He puts clothes on the doll, he puts on a wig, shoes and a little sword. Then, to completely identify the doll and the man,

he baptizes the doll with the man's name. To do this, he has to use Holy Water, stolen from a church. Now, everything is ready for the important part of the magic. The doll is put on a table or chair and the Magician runs a red-hot needle into some part of its body. The wax, touched by the needle, melts. Suppose he puts the needle in under the right ribs where the liver is supposed to be—what happens? At that minute the Baron or King becomes ill with a disease of the liver. The next day another needle goes into the liver and again on the third day, and as the wax man melts, the real man dies. In this way a man's spine can be softened, his eyes destroyed or his bowels made to rot. What do you think of that, Marcus?"

"I have read of it, Master, but I have always doubted it," replied the young man as he tried in vain to get the drift of the old Magician's story.

"Would you believe if I showed you?"

"Certainly—but I will believe you anyway."

"Come with me to my laboratory. Let us see what we can see."

It took some time for the old man to descend to his workshop. There, surrounded by his drugs, glassware and curiosities, he had spent sixty years of his life. He would work for a day and that night write what he had done, and at the end of every year he condensed all of his learning of that year on one piece of parchment in a very special book. Thus, at this time, he had sixty pages to represent sixty years of work. Over half of the pages were crossed out and the word "Errata" written in red ink. Of late years he had worked less and thought more.

One wall of the laboratory was of black marble, with words inlaid in it of a yellow color. This motto read: "All knowledge is golden." In the dark, these words glowed with phosphorescent brilliance. The old Magician never tired of looking at that motto. The only thing that spoiled his pleasure was the fact that he had not originated it. He hoped some day to improvise one that was as true.

It was to this room that the two men went. They came to a pause in front of a long table which held two glass jars. In one was a small turtle, a very small one indeed, no larger than a thumb nail. In the other jar was its twin, identical in shape and color. Between the two jars a tripod stood, holding a copper brazier, filled with burning charcoal.

"In thinking this matter over," began the Magician, "I determined to make an experiment. I have read a thousand tales of such Black Magic, but so far I have never wanted to practise it. In order to do what we shall soon have to do, we must have faith, a firm belief in our own power. So, we have here two turtles. One is alive and the other is made out of wax. I fashioned the wax one myself. The name of the live turtle is Obediah. It had to have a name; so that is what I have called it. Last night I christened the wax turtle by the same name. Now, the two turtles are identical. They look alike and have the same name. I will take the live turtle out of the water and put him in the black bowl, from which he can not escape. Now, here is the wax turtle. We will wipe it carefully and place it on the burning charcoal. It is not a trick I am playing. I am simply dropping a wax turtle on a hot fire so that it will melt. We see at once that it is melting, but watch the live turtle."

The little reptile made a few convulsive movements and then suddenly melted into a dozen drops of fluid. The two men looked at each other. Finally the old man sighed as he said:

"It really does work, Marcus. Just the

same with a little turtle as it did with those old bears in Hispania."

"It certainly does work," agreed Marcus, slowly, but he looked at the Master sidewise as he spoke. "But you have said it is Black Magic, and all the years I sat at your feet as a student you berated such as unworthy of our Brotherhood. Suppose it does work? What then? Will you depart from your moral code of years and thus kill the King and the Cardinal?"

"No. We can not do that," replied the Magician slowly, "for if we did, we were nothing but sorcerers and devil-worshippers and witches ourselves: but we can kill wild animals, and if a man deliberately decides to live in a dangerous country, how can we be blamed if he dies during an earthquake?"

"That is all true, but what has it to do with my dead wife? Or with your wife, either, for that matter?"

"You see nothing to my talk?"

"Pardon me for being blunt—but so far it is just words, going around in a circle—like a snake, swallowing his tail—just that, and a poor dead turtle."

"More words would but confuse you. Can you carry sand and pebbles and clay from the seashore?"

"How much?"

"A great deal. Many buckets of each. It will take you days. Bring it to this room, and we will do some things with it. I have wax here, and while you are working, I will also be toiling with these strong hands of mine, and my clear vision will tell me how well I toil."

MARCUS was unable to tell why the sand, pebbles and clay had to be brought from the beach: in fact, he wondered more and more whether the old man was not truly crazed with grief and age. The beach lay five hundred feet below the castle. To carry a bucket of sand up that winding road was a task for a well man with two hands. Marcus, however, had never disobeyed his Master, and did not intend doing it now. Taking the bucket that the Master gave him, he soon reached the beach and there decided to fill it by thirds with clay, with sand and with white pebbles; thus he could in one load carry a sample of each to the Castle. If the samples were satisfactory, he could start to work in earnest.

After what seemed hours of toil he at last reached the laboratory, where the old man was waiting for him. The long center table was now empty. The old man was working with wax at a side bench. Without looking at him, he ordered Marcus to empty the bucket on the floor. The young man did so, but there seemed to be no end to the white pebbles; finally the sand poured out, at least enough to fill twelve buckets, and then an equal amount of clay. The Magician laughed at Marcus and his astonishment.

"You forget that I am a real worker in magic, my dear lad. That is but a simple trick. The bucket is made from a piece of the Cornucopia of Plenty, the Horn that is never empty. I told you to bring the things to test your obedience. It was necessary for you to make at least one trip. Now, let us start working. I have here a very good map of Astrobella, the country we wanted to make blossom like a Persian rose-garden. We will make a large model of that country on this long table with the clay and wet sand. It will show all the land between the Sierra Darro and the Mare Nostrum. We will put pebbles in piles for mountains and little twigs for trees. I will make houses and castles and trees out of wax. Now, let us begin to model, Marcus, and follow the lines of the map carefully. It must be like Astrobella in every way."

For three days they worked and finally the land was done. With green paint Marcus put in the ocean and the lakes and

rivers, while the Magician placed wax ships upon the water and an exact Castle Doom on the high peak of land, overlooking the water. In some of the meadows little sheep stood silent, while, on a grassy plain, under an open tent, the King in wax sat, talking to the Cardinal and Barons.

The two men stood looking at the beautiful map, but the face of the young man showed his deep grief and worry, for he had lost all hope.

"'Tis a fine map!" he finally said softly, "but it has nothing to do with the death of your wife or mine. It can not bring us back our lost brothers and departed loved ones. There is no revenge in it for my unborn child. It is a pretty map—and that is all."

"Is it a true map?"

"I believe so."

"Accurate in every way?"

"Yes. I have travelled all over Astrobella. It is an accurate picture of the accursed country."

Silently the old man took from a leather box an emerald. Polishing it, he handed it to his pupil for examination. Then he took it back and placed it carefully on the top of the mountain, eastward of the wax Castle Doom.

"How does that look?"

"A pretty gewgaw. A sparkling piece of glass. At the most, a valuable semi-precious jewel."

"Have you ever been on that side of the Castle?"

"You know I have not. You always forbade it."

"I had a reason then—but we will go there now—very slowly—my legs, Marcus, are failing me. Wait till I get a cane. I fear old age is a curse no Magic can fight against."

Finally they stood on a smooth rock. Below them a green lake glistened on the top of the promontory—a lake five hundred feet above the ocean, and its greenness carried with it the black malignity of night.

"I never saw such water!" exclaimed Marcus. "It moves not even to a ripple, and yet the trees are swaying with the wind."

"No one else ever saw the like," agreed the Magician. "Now, take a small stone and throw it out to the middle of the pond."

The young man did so. To his surprize, the stone bounced several times and then rested on the emerald surface. Slowly, from each side of the lake, the shore moved toward the center, the two shores met, and the lake was gone.

"Nothing surprizes me any more," said the pupil. "Here is a lake that a

stone will not sink into—a lake that now is covered with land and trees. What does it mean, Master, if I may be so bold as to ask the question?"

"It is an eye," replied the old man, but would say nothing more.

Slowly, with the young man by his side helping him, the Magician toiled back to the laboratory. Exhausted, he sank into his chair, and it was some time before he could breathe.

"Now, Marcus," he finally began, "I am going to tell you something that only I know, but before I tell you, look at the map of Astrobella, and find it out for yourself. Remember the eye and tell me what you see—or have you forgotten to really look and see things for what they are? While I am waiting, I will close my eyes and rest."

MINUTES passed, and suddenly Marcus waked the Magician with a shout.

"Master! Master! I have it. This is the figure of a dragon, a salamander, a veritable giant of an animal. See the eye, the mouth, the head and neck, the feet and tail! See how the mountains look like unto a backbone. As I see it now, it grows in my imagination—a strange light comes from the emerald which serves for an eye. Can it be alive? Or am I mad?"

The Magician smiled at his pupil's eagerness and excited interest. He slowly replied:

"What you see on the table, Marcus, is but a map, made of wax, sand, clay, stones and little twig-trees. However, it is a true image of the land of Astrobella, which land killed our loved ones. But remember the lake and the land which closed over it when you threw the stone. That lake, represented by this piece of glass on the map, is an eye. That is, I believe it to be an eye, and it is my feeling and idea that all this country is simply one of those large, wonderfully enormous animals that used to live in the world we now live in. For centuries it has slept, with its back to the shore, with its feet, neck and head sticking out into the water. It has rested here so long that its hide has been covered with sand and soil. Forests have grown on its back, and cities have been built on its plains. It has slept on because nothing has happened to make it move. Lately, the Castle has swayed and the eye opens and shuts. It seems as though the salamander is waking from its long sleep.

"On this monster, a small people have made their home. They have a King, Cardinal, barons and slaves. Three cities shelter the common folks, the stupid children of stupid parents. Always these people have been unkind to those who have tried to help them. Our brothers have died, trying to uplift them. Your wife and mine were killed without mercy. It is now time for them to die!"

"But you say we can not kill people by Black Magic?"

"We can not, but we can kill a wild animal! All their worshipped Saints and beloved heroes have always done that! We will destroy him, and if the people are killed in his writhings, are we to blame?"

Marcus wondered at the old man's cunning. At the same time he doubted it all; so he asked the question, "But will it work?"

"I believe so. We will rest for now and begin the experiment tomorrow. Tonight I will christen this map animal. In order to doubly identify it, I will doubly name it Astrobella and also Terra Prodigiosis. Surely that should suffice. The baptism is a secret thing—not even you must see it. I must name it and yet

not consecrate it; Holy Water must be used, but for unholy means. You must trust me and sleep and join me on the morrow."

"And no harm can befall you?"

"Nothing. Fear not! Nothing can hurt me since my wife died."

EAGERLY Marcus waited for the morrow, which, like all next days, finally dawned. He found the Magician pottering around the laboratory, anxiously waiting to start work.

"I am going to destroy the little piece of land under St. Paulos first," announced the Magician. "You go up on the high tower and look seaward. 'Tis a clear day, and across the bay you can see the copper roof of the Cathedral glisten in the sun. You stay there and watch, and when you see anything unusual, come and tell me. Meantime I will slowly dig out the sand under these pretty wax houses. I use a gold knife. While at the tower, observe if there is anything unusual swaying Castle Doom."

Up to the top climbed Marcus, a trifle disappointed at not being permitted to stay in the laboratory. The morning was bright, the air more than clear. Far across the bay the copper roof of the Cathedral glittered golden in the glow of early dawn. He waited anxiously, unwilling to let a single moment's gaze depart from that golden building. Suddenly it raised in the air, passed in a graceful curve and disappeared in the waters of Mare Nostrum.

At the risk of his neck, Marcus ran breathless down the steps to the laboratory. He found the Magician in his armchair, a small garden trowel in his hand —his eyes closed.

"What did you do, Master?"

The old man opened his eyes and smiled.

"I picked up the Cathedral very carefully and put it over on the painted ocean. What happened?"

"I saw the copper roof glisten in a long circle through the air and drop into the water."

The two men looked at each other.

"Then it works!" said the old man at last, and, even in the saying of it, he seemed to age.

After that the two men worked daily in the laboratory to irritate the monster, but not to fully rouse him, and, as they worked, strange things happened in the land of Astrobella. First, the land caved away from St. Paulos so that the entire city fell into the sea, and, with it, the Cardinal's palace and the Cardinal himself. The city was standing one evening in all its grandeur, and the next morning it was sunken in the Mare Nostrum. A few days later the Rio Serio changed its course and flowed, a torrent, through Valencia, and when the fugitives fled to Melaga, that city, like St. Paulos, dropped into the sea. Now the whole land began to quiver, and the folk fled in vain to the mountains, which shook down on them rocks and uprooted trees. Part of the country was covered with tidal waves, drowning the cattle and destroying the crops.

A few of the citizens escaped in boats. Also, a few, but very few in number, reached Terra Incognita. The rest died where they had lived. The King and all his nobles and clergy died, never knowing why. On the table in the laboratory the sand monster remained, but little changed. The damage to him had only irritated him. No vital spot had been touched. His hide had been scraped till he had moved restless in his sleep, but the only real harm had been to the parasites living on him.

THE Magician was growing older—he was more reckless and childish. It became harder for his pupil, Marcus, to understand him. There had been repeated arguments as to the final disposition of the sand monster. The Magician wanted to sweep it all to the floor. Marcus protested and tried to show the danger. The old man lived in the past: hallucinating, he called on loved ones, long dead, to come and see his final vengeance.

Marcus watched him, fed and cared for him, but daily the fear of him grew. For now Marcus was satisfied with vengeance, but the Master demanded the utmost sacrifice. Marcus asked the Master to leave the room and lock the door; to let the sand monster, sleeping, lull the real monster to repose. The aged one, antagonized by the constant interference with his will, lost touch with reality and became suspicious and paranoidal. Who was this young man who watched him so closely? Had he not taught him all he knew? Or was he a substitute for Marcus? Marcus was dead! Marcus had two hands! So he determined to be alone again and send this interfering stranger to a safe place.

With this thought in mind he worked a magic, and from the East, over the Mare Nostrum, in the full moonlight of a night in June, came a boat with purple sails, and in it sailors in white linen. Ambassadors it carried from the Mountains of Gobi and the Magicians dwelling therein.

The chief of these wonder-workers climbed the narrow path to Castle Doom and told his errand to the Master. The brethren from Gobi needed help in this way and that and would the Master himself come to Gobi? But the aged Magician said, "No!" He pleaded his age and weakness, but he was willing to send his pupil, a young man, well versed in all the lore of the West: and naught would content him but that Marcus should go back with the Ambassadors in the boat with purple sails.

And the young man, in spite of his vague apprehensions and uneasy forebodings, promised to obey and do as the Master bade him. The sailors were called, and they were given treasures, jewels and gold ornaments and wondrous furnishings to carry with Marcus as gifts to the brethren in Gobi; and they carried also to the ships all the books from the Master's library.

Now the Master sat on his easy-chair at the gate of Castle Doom, and as his treasures were carried out, he rested, dry-eyed, but when he saw his books, his lovely manuscripts with inlaid leather bindings and those with pages of parchment and vellum, when he saw these being carried out of the Castle to go to strangers in Gobi to read, then the tears rolled down his cheeks, and though he tried to hide them in his white beard, they rested there like pearls.

Finally, all was on board, and Marcus knelt before him for his blessing, and the Master, now soberly sane, though determined to do what he had decided, gave him his thumb ring which some say had been worn by King Sulliman. So, finally, the purple sails bellowed in the blustering breeze and wafted the ship to the East and toward the land of Gobi, where the Master sent Marcus by a magic—sending in order to save the young man's life.

Then and then only did the aged Magician, last of his race in all those lands, go tottering down the stone steps to the laboratory. He went to the table, and with his hands, those hands made strong at the expense of all of him, he tore the sand dragon apart into a thousand pieces

and cast them upon the floor. Exhausted and tired of life, he sank back into his chair and closed his eyes.

To him came youth and the Wonder Woman whom he had called his wife ere the flames burned her in the square at St. Paulos. As she kissed him, his body died, but the soul of him joined his love in that land where she awaited him.

A few minutes later the monster shrieked, and with a mighty leap plunged into the boiling waters of Mare Nostrum, and of all the land of Astrobella there remained naught but an evil memory.

Shadows of Chapultepec

By ALICE FANSON

O Wood of Dreams! what misted centuries
Have wrapped their spell around your stately trees!
Veiled by the hanging moss, my spirit sees
Majestic halls, with jade and turquoise bright,
And sculptured walls that catch the moon's pale light,
Fantasmagoria of the Haunted Night!
I breathe the smoke of sacrificial fires
Where stark gray pyramids like funeral pyres
Loom darkly underneath these lofty spires. . . .
And here and there symbolic serpents twine;
Their eyes of black and glistening "ixtli" shine
From moss-grown trunks and loops of twisted vine!
The drip of fountains marks the passing hours,
And creeping myrtle, loneliest of flowers,
Drapes with its amaranth bloom the fadeless bowers!
There is strange magic in the silvery haze
That floats like incense in cathedral ways
Through these weird "sambras," this enchanted maze;
For day and night I hear the measured tread
Of mighty warriors numbered with the Dead
Long folded in some dark and leaf-strewn bed!
The lordly Tzins! the chieftains of their race!
In all their spectral grandeur, I can trace
Pride that has dwindled to pathetic grace!
They mourn the glory and the pageantry
Of the dead Past they never more shall see
Save in this ghostly Wood of Memory!

The Nameless Mummy

By ARLTON EADIE

An amazing tale of the weird events that accompanied the unwrapping of an Egyptian mummy

IN SPITE of the fact that it was still within the hours of public admission, the lofty galleries of the Helmstone Museum were, save for an occasional uniformed attendant, absolutely deserted; and Peter Venn, the curator, rejoiced accordingly. Usually he was only too pleased to show visitors round the large and well-stocked museum over which he had charge, waxing especially eloquent over the treasures of the Egyptian section, in which it was particularly rich, but today he had work on hand which would monopolize his attention for many hours. By the bequest of a recently deceased collector, the museum had come into possession of a great number of Egyptian antiquities, and it was to the examination and classification of these that his labors were being directed.

The room in which he worked was situated at the extreme end of the Egyptian Gallery, being separated from it by a partition, the upper part of which was glass. By simply raising his head he could obtain an uninterrupted view of the long vista of decorated mummy-cases, carved sphinxes, and monuments which went to make up the more bulky contents, and it was owing to this fact that it was not thought necessary to have an attendant stationed in that particular room.

The task before Peter Venn was no light one. The objects with which his little room was crowded seemed to have been garnered promiscuously by their late owner and to have lain neglected for many years. One of the great mummy-cases had not even been opened, and it was only natural that this should first engage Peter Venn's attention. The study of Egyptology is notoriously full of surprizes, and every unexamined relic of that long-dead civilization may hold a secret that will startle the world.

It must be admitted that the appearance of the casket was such as to arouse his curiosity. It was of unpainted cedar-wood, its sole ornamentation a figure of the Goddess Nout carved on the lid in an attitude as though she were shielding the body within with her protecting wings. But what puzzled Peter Venn most was the small bronze tablet fixed to the lid. This had been covered with a thick coating of bitumen, apparently with the object of concealing the identity of the mummy which lay within, and it was only after having expended two hours in removing this that he was able to see the inscription it bore. This, greatly to his amazement, proved to be written in Latin.

"Regna, honores, div tiae, caduca et incerta sunt," he was able to read at last, and as he uttered the words he felt a thrill of exultation tingling his veins. "He must have been an important, if not a royal, personage to have such an epitaph inscribed on his coffin," he muttered to himself. "There would be no point in writing of a poor and obscure man that 'Kingdoms, honors, riches, are frail and fickle things.' He was evidently a Roman —maybe one of the higher officers of the

"From the finger tips of the statue of Isis fell the blood-red drops."

legions that Julius Cæsar sent to Egypt. Or perhaps it is even——"

Whilst he had been speculating on the identity of the body which lay within, Peter Venn had taken up his chisel and inserted it beneath the lid. His hand was already on the handle to lever the coffin open, when suddenly he paused, overcome with a strange feeling of helplessness that he could neither define nor explain.

Peter was not an imaginative man, neither was he a novice in his profession. Years of constant association had blunted that feeling of involuntary awe with which the average person would regard the exposure of a body in its two-thousand-year-old resting-place; to him a mummy was just an interesting antiquity, to be examined, classified and ticketed before being placed in its glass case. But now, to his surprize and annoyance, he found himself suddenly overcome with a feeling very much like physical terror. And yet, strangely enough, the actual reason for his fear did not appear to be the mummy-case itself; it needed something more potent, more vital, more hu-

man to account for the sensation which possessed him. Slowly, unconsciously, as though actuated by a compelling volition alien to himself, Peter straightened up and looked through the glass partition, and a slight gasp came from between his parted lips as his eyes fell upon the figure of the woman who stood outside.

She was rather under medium height, slim and dark-haired, with small, delicately chiselled features and long, slightly almond-shaped eyes. Her dress was ordinary enough; a tailored costume of amber-colored cloth with a small, close-fitting hat to match; but that was the last detail of her appearance that Peter noticed. All his interest was centered on her face, and particularly her eyes, which drew his own and held them with a compelling, hypnotic force.

Peter Venn was forty and a bachelor, and up to then women had played but a small part in his life. But now, as he looked into the eyes of this strange woman he seemed to see reflected in those almond-shaped pools of darkness a vision of his youthful hopes and dreams; once more he was filled with vague, romantic longings which he had thought he had long since outgrown. A slight flush crept into his pale cheeks and his eyes began to shine behind their double glasses. Almost without thinking what he did, Peter Venn opened the door of the partition.

"Good afternoon." Even as he uttered it, the commonplace greeting sounded utterly banal, but it was the only opening he could think of. "If you are interested in Egyptian antiquities I shall be most happy to show you round."

A slight smile hovered round the full, rich lips as she glanced at the long rows of glass cases.

"I am certainly interested, as you say," she answered in a full, musical voice, "but whether the information you are able to impart will be anything new is another matter."

In spite of the smile which accompanied her words, their implied contempt for his knowledge caused a frown to gather on his forehead.

"I'm sure I beg your pardon." His tone was slightly sarcastic. "I was not aware that I was addressing one well versed in ancient lore. Perhaps it is I who should be the listener and you the expounder of the meaning of the relics around us?"

Her slender shoulders lifted in a tiny shrug.

"Perhaps," she agreed, with such composure that Venn felt as though he were being laughed at. His reputation as an Egyptologist was no small one, and it was intolerable to think this slip of a girl should set her knowledge on an equal with his. There was a somewhat grim smile on his lips as he drew the sun-blind off one of the center cases and pointed to a roll of papyrus which lay spread out beneath.

"This is written in the hieratic characters of the Thirteenth Dynasty," he explained gravely. "I should be very grateful for a little assistance in translating it."

He paused, waiting for the look of confusion to expose the shallowness of her boasted learning. To his unbounded amazement, however, the girl stepped up to the case, and, with a mere casual glance at the queer-looking writing, at once began to translate:

" 'This is the record of Manenka-Ra, High Priest of Horus, son of Isis, He who presents the souls of the departed to Osiris, after Thoth, having weighed their hearts in the balance and found if they be righteous and true——' "

She broke off and looked up with a little smile. "Need I read further? This is so elementary, you know."

For a full minute Peter Venn remained staring at her. Who was this entrancing young lady who so glibly ran off the complicated script that had taken him, professor though he was, months to decipher?

"Who are you?" he asked curiously. "And how is it that one so young as you is able to read a language that requires many years of study even to grasp the rudiments?"

Again her shoulders lifted in that enigmatical shrug.

"What does it signify where I gained my knowledge? The only fact that matters is that I do possess knowledge so deep and far-reaching that your mind can not do more than enter on the outermost fringe of its boundless, unexplored territory."

Venn looked puzzled, as well he might.

"I'm afraid I do not understand," he murmured.

Again that little shrug that he was beginning to know so well.

"Naturally." The air of complacence with which she assumed her superiority almost took his breath away. "Some time—soon, perhaps—you shall know who and what I am. In the meantime I should be very glad to see those objects which have recently been bequeathed to your museum."

Venn's forehead creased in perplexity. Here was another mystery. Scarcely anybody outside the staff had been informed of the bequest, yet here was a complete stranger apparently in possession of the full details. But he seemed to recognize the futility of seeking an explanation. After all, it was only another extraordinary circumstance connected with this most extraordinary young lady. He shrugged and pointed toward his room behind the glass partition.

"You are quite at liberty to examine them," he told her. "They are in there, and——"

He broke off short and started forward with outstretched arms. For no sooner had she reached the threshold of the room which contained the unnamed mummy than she uttered a low, strangled cry and staggered back, limp and nerveless. Half leading, half carrying, he got her to the nearest chair and prepared to go in search of a glass of water. But she stopped him with a sudden gesture.

"It is nothing," she said, though her trembling lips and ashy features belied her words. "A sudden faintness, that is all. I shall be better—soon."

He looked from her to the unopened mummy-case. Deep down in his mind a suspicion was beginning to form that the coming of this strange girl was intimately connected with the mummy that he was on the point of exposing. Moreover, he could have sworn that it was the sight of the case which had called forth the display of emotion he had just witnessed.

"It seems as if this mummy-case is not entirely unknown to you," he said slowly.

She inclined her dark head with a gesture of assent.

"I have seen it . . . once . . . many years ago," she answered hesitatingly. "And . . . that is the reason of my presence here."

"I knew it!" cried Peter Venn triumphantly.

With a quick movement that somehow reminded him of the sinuous glide of a panther, the girl rose to her feet and came toward him. Beautiful though her face was, there was now a look on it that filled him with vague alarm. The red lips were set and determined; the eyes held in their starry depths the blaze of an indomitable will. She glided so close to him that he could feel her warm breath fanning his cheek.

"You will open that mummy-case to-

night, after the museum is closed," she said, speaking in low, hurried tones. "I will be present, and after we have seen—what we shall see—I will tell you such a story as human ears have never listened to before."

Peter Venn drew back, aghast.

"What you ask is impossible!" he cried. "My position—my reputation——"

She raised her dark eyes to his, and once again he was conscious of the same mental numbness that had preceded her first coming. It seemed as though her will was fighting for ascendency with his own—fighting and slowly but surely winning.

"At ten o'clock tonight."

The words were a command rather than a question. Hidden fires seemed to glow in her eyes as she uttered them. Peter Venn threw out his hands with the gesture of one who leaves the future in the hands of fate.

"Very well—at ten," he said hoarsely.

A moment later he was alone.

DURING the ensuing hours Peter Venn did nothing but consider his extraordinary interview with the strange girl, and the more he considered it the uglier the whole business seemed. That he, a responsible and respectable official, having in his charge objects whose value was literally beyond all price, had consented to admit an utter stranger to the museum at the dead of night seemed almost beyond belief. Yet he undoubtedly had consented. Why? He asked himself the question a thousand times as he made his way through the darkened streets to his bachelor home; it dinned itself in his ears as he sat over his solitary supper; the very ticking of the tall grandfather clock seemed to reiterate the maddening query as it recorded the passing of the seconds which brought him nearer the appointed time. Why? . . . why? . . . why?

Although she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, he was not, he told himself angrily, in love with her; fascinated, dominated, maybe, but no more in love with her than the fluttering bird is in love with the serpent whose glittering eyes lure it to its destruction. Oh, why had he not asserted himself, told her that the thing she asked was impossible to grant, and firmly but gently dismissed her? Yes, that was what he ought to have done, and that was what he must do. He would keep the appointment, but only to tell her that he had changed his mind and any request to view the new exhibits must be made through the directors of the museum.

And yet——

Peter Venn found his newly formed resolution wavering as he remembered those compelling yet adorable eyes. After all, what was it that she asked of him? Merely that she should be present when he examined the strange mummy. Surely there would be no great harm in humoring her whim, or curiosity, or superstition, or whatever was at the back of her unusual desire. And, to confess the truth, he himself was conscious of no small curiosity to see the outcome of the affair.

Who was this amazingly persuasive young lady who was able to read the hieratic script of two thousand years ago as readily as he could read the evening paper? Was she aware of the contents of that Roman-Egyptian mummy-case? Was she——?

The mellow chimes of the clock announcing half-past nine brought his speculations to an abrupt close. Rising hastily, he hurried on his hat and coat and, telling his housekeeper that he had an engagement that would probably keep him very late indeed, issued forth to keep his tryst.

It was just on the hour when Peter Venn turned into the street in which the private door of the museum was situated, only to find it lying silent and deserted. The fair unknown had not kept the appointment—he had been fooled!

He was surprized at the mingled emotions which this discovery called forth in his mind. He should, he told himself, have felt relieved at the respite, and possibly a little angry at the trick which had been played on him. But actually these feelings were swamped by the pang of acute disappointment that shot through his heart at the sight of the empty street. He paused irresolutely; then, with a shrug and a sigh, he turned to go.

Without warning, as though it had suddenly materialized out of the shadows, a hand touched his arm, and a voice, clear, musical, but intensely low, spoke to him.

"Did you think that I should fail to come, my friend?" A slight smile rose to the girl's lips as she noted the amazement depicted on his face as he swung round. "I have been hiding in the shadows, awaiting your arrival. Our task has risks enough without adding to them by courting the observation of chance passers-by. But time presses. We must do what we came to do before the watchman makes his rounds at midnight."

Peter paused in the act of inserting his pass-key in the door.

"How do you know of that?" he asked, but she gave an impatient shake of her head.

"What matter how I know? Proceed, my Peter, and cease to puzzle over trifles. There will be other, far deeper, mysteries to occupy your thoughts before morning."

So sinister was the tone in which she uttered the words that Peter Venn found his early suspicions returning with redoubled force.

"Indeed?" he began. "In that case——"

"Be silent—and open that door!"

Such was the imperious command of that quick sibilant order that Venn, actuated by an impulse which overruled both caution and fear, inserted the key and opened the door.

It was not the first occasion on which Peter Venn had been in the museum at night. An ardent delver into the lore of the past, he had often remained poring over some fragile roll of papyrus or musty black-leather tome until the early hours of the morning; but never had those shadowy halls and galleries seemed so full of eery mystery as they did that night. The faint echoes, which their stealthy footsteps sent floating along the silent corridors, sounded like ghostly whisperings; the beam of the electric pocket-lamp which the girl had switched on sent uncouth, grotesque shadows dancing on the walls; heavy odors, sickly sweet yet death-like, clung about the hall where the still, linen-swathed mummies lay in their last long sleep. It was with a feeling of positive relief that he at last entered his private room and knew that the time for action had arrived.

Pausing only to remove his hat and overcoat, Peter Venn immediately set to work to prize up the coffin-lid of the unnamed mummy. But the task was long and tedious; for, eager and excited though he undoubtedly was, he did not neglect the precautions which long years of handling frail and precious objects had ingrained in him. Cloth pads had to be placed beneath the fulcrum of the tool which he was using as a lever, in order to prevent the metal splintering the aged wood; numerous wedges had to be inserted into the gradually widening space to prevent the heavy lid slipping back as soon as he withdrew the point of the tool. But at last the lid was clear of the numerous tongues of wood that had held it in

position, and, exerting all his strength, he lifted it off and placed it out of the way in a corner of the room.

Inside the coffin, filling it to within a few inches of the top, was a quantity of withered flowers, amongst which the lotus could still be recognized, and these completely hid the body from view. But as soon as he had swept aside the first layer he caught the gleam of yellow metal among the withered petals. His heart gave a sudden bound at the sight. Only one metal could have retained its luster undimmed through the ages which had elapsed since the casket was sealed, and that was gold. Had he stumbled on a treasure unawares?

A cloud of fine dust rose from the shrivelled leaves and blossoms as he scooped them up with trembling hands and tumbled them on the floor. Coughing, half blinded, consumed with that frantic excitement which the true antiquarian feels when on the brink of a unique discovery, Peter Venn worked on until the body was completely revealed. Hitherto he had worked by the light of the little electric pocket-lamp; but now, regardless of the risk of discovery, he switched on the lights and stood regarding his find with glistening eyes.

"Well, I've certainly never seen a mummy like this before!" he muttered. "But what a find! Ye gods! what an unprecedented find!"

The body was that of a tall, heavily built man clad from head to foot in the richly wrought accouterments of a Roman officer of the highest rank. His helmet, cuirass, greaves and armlets were elaborately decorated with figures taken from the mythology of ancient Rome, and had either been heavily plated with gold or else were composed of the solid metal. Contrary to the usual Egyptian custom, the body was not incased in linen swathings, but whatever method of embalming had been used, it had fulfilled its purpose well. The flesh was firm and not discolored; the features composed and life-like. The countenance was bold and remarkably handsome, though the mouth betrayed a slight weakness which the dark beard failed quite to conceal. Although both the beard and the short, curling hair were shot with gray, it was clear that he had been still in the full vigor of manhood when death had overtaken him—suddenly, it seemed, for his features showed no trace of the ravages of a long illness.

All these things Venn noted in a few seconds. Then he saw something else—a robe of Imperial purple caught on the left shoulder with a jewelled clasp.

"An Emperor—a Roman Cæsar!" he gasped, and looked closer at the marble-like countenance. "Can it be Julius Cæsar? Impossible—he was a shorter man and much older when he died. Who then? What Roman ruler died in Egypt? What, is it possible that this is——"

He bent forward and snatched up an object that lay upon the shining corselet. It was a small square of wood, thickly coated with wax—one of the "tablets" which took the place of notebooks in ancient times. Upon it a few words had been scratched in a trembling hand.

"*Aut Caesar aut nullus*—'Either Cæsar or nothing'," Peter Venn read with staring eyes, and then the almost illegible signature beneath: "Marcus Antonius."

For a moment he stood like a man turned to stone as he strove to realize the stupendous importance of his discovery.

"Mark Antony?" he muttered. "The friend of Julius Cæsar, the conqueror of Brutus and Cassius—the man who won the whole world and then threw it away for the love of——"

"Queen Cleopatra—myself!" said a low, sad voice at his elbow.

So absorbed had Venn been that he had quite forgotten the presence of the girl. At the sound of her voice he raised his eyes, stared for an instant at the vision that confronted him across the body of the dead Emperor, then recoiled with a cry.

She had thrown off the long evening wrap and now appeared in what seemed to him like a fancy-dress costume of an elaborate and rather daring nature, consisting as it did almost entirely of flashing jewels. Jewelled was the fringed girdle which encircled her slender waist, also the deep golden collar round her neck. Rubies gleamed in the eyes of the royal asp upon her brow; sapphires and emeralds flashed from the ground as she moved her sandalled feet. She seemed less like a woman than a flame of living fire.

"Are you mad?" he cried. "Cleopatra lived two thousand years ago and committed suicide over her lover's body after his defeat by Octavianus at Alexandria."

"Are you so certain of this?" she asked slowly.

"Of course. She died by the bite of an asp——"

The eyes of the golden serpent on her brow flashed red fire as she shook her head, a mocking smile playing about her lips the while.

"The old fable! Started by the Queen from motives of policy, spread by common report, garnered by the ancient historian, Plutarch, and recorded in his *Lives;* woven into undying poetry by Shakespeare in his famous play; repeated blindly by the smaller fry of the modern literary world—truly the story has many godfathers. Yet it is a fable nevertheless. Cleopatra did not die at Alexandria. She stands before you now!"

Peter Venn attempted to signify his opinion of her assertion by uttering a derisive laugh. But somehow the laugh refused to come. Wild though her words were, there was something so tragic in her manner that, fiercely though his reason might fight against it, he found his skepticism wavering. Surely, he argued, it must be something more than a mere coincidence that brought her to him on the very night that the coffin was opened.

"I promised you a mystery, did I not, my professor?" she went on. "Listen, and you shall hear one—aye, and behold a picture of ancient Egypt more vivid and moving than a lifetime of poring over musty records could bring to your mind. Know then, Cleopatra—Plutarch notwithstanding—did not slay herself when Octavianus Cæsar and his centurions came to drag her in chains to grace his triumph in Rome. Long years before, she had penetrated the Great Pyramid and wrested from its most secret place, in its most secret chamber deep down in the living rock, the most wonderful secret in the world. There, from the finger-tips of the statue of Isis, the Great Mother of All, fall the blood-red drops which well up from the very vitals of this planet, the mystic life-giving and life-preserving essence to which all nature owes its existence. And whosoever drinks of that draft shall never taste mortal death. I drank of it long before the great Julius fell beneath the daggers of Brutus and the rest, and behold! I am living yet!

"Of the priest of Isis who revealed this wondrous secret to me, and of what befell him later, I do not intend to speak. Suffice to say that no sooner did I feel that immortal vitality coursing through my veins like growing fire than I resolved that I alone should hold the secret of its hidden source until I could find a fitting mate, who, after I had given to him this precious gift, should rule the world with me. I emerged from the Pyramid—

alone—and from that hour began my task of bringing the world to my feet.

"You must read the history of that period to judge how far I succeeded in that aim. Kings and rulers became pawns in the game whose stake was supremacy—provinces the squares of the chessboard on which it was played—the whole known world was the board itself. I played and —for a time—won. For with the fuller, richer life bestowed by the mystic draft there had come a deeper, wiser perception of my fellow-creatures; a power to read their hidden thoughts, a knowledge how to use their wisdom and their folly, their virtues and their failings, for my own ends. But of all those whom I used and flung aside there was not one who had the power to light the flame of love within my heart. It seemed as if the power I had stolen from the Gods was a two-edged sword, wounding its wielder with its backward stroke. While investing my body with immortality, it seemed to have killed the power of love in my soul. My triumphs and conquests turned to Dead Sea fruit in my mouth; it seemed as if I were destined to be the richest yet poorest of womankind. I was even beginning to consider taking the alternant which the dead priest had entrusted to me; a pinch of greenish powder, enclosed in a hollow emerald set in a ring, which would counteract the life-giving draft and render me again mortal. My resolution was almost taken, when there came into my life the man whose body lies before you."

She stretched out her hand and laid it on the pallid brow with a gesture of infinite tenderness. Venn, his mind a tumult in which sanity fought to overcome a belief in the impossible, waited in silence for her to continue.

"Long before we met I had heard reports of Marcus Antonius, the Triumvir who with Octavianus and Lepidus ruled the Roman Empire. A brave, vain, handsome and fickle-minded soldier was the character that common rumor gave him. When I received his summons to appear before him in Cilicia to answer for having assisted Cassius in the recent war against the Triumvirs, I thought the task of changing my judge into my suppliant would be an easy one. I sailed down the River Cydnus to meet him, in a barge with gilded hull and sails of royal purple, rowed by silver oars which beat time to the music of flutes and harps. He stood to receive me on the shore in a golden chariot drawn by milk-white steeds, a wreath of ivy upon his proud head, a snowy mantle over his armor of dazzling gold. There were no words of recrimination or defense uttered now. Instead, a feast was spread and the multitude rejoiced, crying out that Bacchus was come to feast with Venus, for the common good of Asia. The sword was buried in the wine-cup, and softly-voiced lovers' vows took the place of the clash of contending legions. Nor was it pretense on my part. The sacred fire of love had kindled in my heart; I had found the man who was to sit by my side, god-like and immortal in very truth, ruling the world with me."

Peter Venn started and a dull red flush appeared on his sallow cheeks. So small a part had women played in his life that it needed the pangs of jealousy to reveal the fact that he loved this strange, beautiful being who had drifted across his path. He forgot the tale she was telling, with its manifold impossibilities; forgot that her own words proclaimed her either as an immortal being or else a lunatic; forgot that she was young and beautiful, he middle-aged and bent with study. All he knew was that he loved her. Mad or sane, mortal or undying, every fiber in his body impelled him to crush her slender form to his and shower kisses on those

red, red lips until the light of love awoke in her long, slumberous eyes. She was incomparable, divine! Were her story true, small wonder that she had swayed the destinies of nations as a hurricane shakes a clump of reeds!

Controlling himself with an effort, he realized that she was speaking again.

"For a space our lives were one long series of fêtes and banquets, throughout which I narrowly observed the behavior of my chosen consort, weighing his soul's worth in a balance as fine as a jeweller's scales; gaging, considering, and at last doubting. Handsome he was, and of a noble carriage, fearless in battle and generous to a fault; but his heart was fickle as the spring winds. I hesitated, putting off the day when I would take him to the Pyramid and endow him with a power equal to my own. I hesitated while Octavianus' fleet and legions mustered against my beloved, nor did his defeat at Actium spur me to the deed. Only after Antony's troops had deserted and he himself was a hunted fugitive did I form my resolve.

"But I had tarried too long. Antony, hearing a false report of my death, had already fallen on his sword. He died before I could reach him, and Olympus, my physician, a man whose skill exceeded that of the greatest masters of the craft, caused him to be embalmed and buried in a secret place. Poor Olympus! He was a faithful servant, faithful unto death. He was captured by the victorious troops of Octavianus the following day, and died under torture rather than reveal the tomb of Antony.

"But I was allowed but little time for lamentation. News was brought that the enemy was advancing. I did not fear death—indeed I would rather have welcomed it—but I would never adorn the triumphant progress of the man who had torn my loved one from me. My preparations were quickly made. One of my female slaves, who resembled me somewhat in face and figure, was dressed in my crown and robes, laid upon the royal couch, and slain by the bite of an asp. Her violently contorted features easily passed for mine. The Romans proclaimed my death. I was safe."

A tone of infinite weariness had crept into her voice, but when she resumed her tale it was in livelier accents. She was like a jaded traveller who quickens his pace in a last effort to reach the long-desired goal.

"Aye, I was safe, and yet I longed for death. All the pomp and power which I could still grasp by stretching out my hand seemed as nothing now that Antony was dead—less than nothing, for now my immortality meant nothing but a long, empty pilgrimage through the world. I longed and prayed for the death I had defied. Then I thought of the green powder which would bring oblivion. I eagerly searched my belongings. It was not there. Then I remembered. I had given the ring to Antony at one of our feasts, laughingly telling him it was the most precious thing in the world. In my grief and distraction I had allowed him to be interred with the ring still on his finger.

"Night and day I searched for the tomb—searched far more diligently for the secret of Death than I had for that of Life. But Olympus had done his work too well; the tomb could not be found. And he himself had died with his secret untold.

"From that hour my boasted immortality was but a living death. All my thoughts and energy were now directed, not to the shaping of nations and the dominating of men, but to the search for those few grains of green powder which

would buy my freedom from the life that had become a burden and a punishment. I shudder now as I recall those dreary, dreary years. I searched, I explored, I bribed, I cajoled—aye, I tortured and slew that I might find the hidden tomb. But it seemed as if I should never regain possession of the drug I craved—until today."

"Today?" echoed Peter Venn, raising his eyebrows.

"Yes." She lifted the dead hand and slipped an emerald ring from one of the fingers. "Here is my order of release!"

She raised it to her lips—to kiss it, Venn thought. Too late he saw her real intention. The bezel of the ring had flown open as her finger pressed a hidden spring, releasing a tiny pinch of green powder between her eager lips. Venn dashed forward and caught her as she swayed. . . .

Shock — horror — apprehension — the three emotions beat upon his brain, numbing it as though with physical blows. Everything before his eyes went blurred and indistinct, and when his vision cleared he found he was holding a withered, jewel-clad corpse.

AT TWELVE o'clock, when the old night-watchman made his usual round, he found Peter Venn apparently hard at work at his accustomed task.

"So there were *two* o' them there mummies in that box, sir?" he said, as he came forward and looked curiously into the open case. "A soldier and his missus, maybe, buried together. Touching, ain't it, to see them lying there after all these years?"

Peter Venn nodded silently and, unseen by the other, a tear rolled down his cheek and fell upon the brow of the woman who, by devious paths, had now reached her appointed place.

Coming soon . . .

The Phantom Hand

By VICTOR ROUSSEAU

A thrilling novel of black magic and occult evil

Watch for this fascinating story in WEIRD TALES

"Brill reeled back against the wall with a choking cry."

The Horror From the Mound

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

A grisly tale of a screaming fear let loose from bondage after having been buried for more than three hundred years

STEVE BRILL did not believe in ghosts or demons. Juan Lopez did. But neither the caution of the one nor the sturdy skepticism of the other was shield against the horror that fell upon them—the horror forgotten by men for more than three hundred years—a screaming fear monstrously resurrected from the black lost ages.

Yet as Steve Brill sat on his sagging stoop that last evening, his thoughts were as far from uncanny menaces as the thoughts of man can be. His ruminations were bitter but materialistic. He surveyed his farmland and he swore. Brill was tall, rangy and tough as boot-leather—true son of the iron-bodied pioneers who wrenched West Texas from the wilderness. He was

browned by the sun and strong as a long-horned steer. His lean legs and the boots on them showed his cowboy instincts, and now he cursed himself that he had ever climbed off the hurricane deck of his crank-eyed mustang and turned to farming. He was no farmer, the young puncher admitted profanely.

Yet his failure had not all been his fault. Plentiful rain in the winter—so rare in West Texas—had given promise of good crops. But as usual, things had happened. A late blizzard had destroyed all the budding fruit. The grain which had looked so promising was ripped to shreds and battered into the ground by terrific hailstorms just as it was turning yellow. A period of intense dryness, followed by another hailstorm, finished the corn.

Then the cotton, which had somehow struggled through, fell before a swarm of grasshoppers which stripped Brill's field almost over night. So Brill sat and swore that he would not renew his lease—he gave fervent thanks that he did not own the land on which he had wasted his sweat, and that there were still broad rolling ranges to the west where a strong young man could make his living riding and roping.

Now as Brill sat glumly, he was aware of the approaching form of his nearest neighbor, Juan Lopez, a taciturn old Mexican who lived in a hut just out of sight over the hill across the creek, and grubbed for a living. At present he was clearing a strip of land on an adjoining farm, and in returning to his hut he crossed a corner of Brill's pasture.

Brill idly watched him climb through the barbed-wire fence and trudge along the path he had worn in the short dry grass. He had been working at his present job for over a month now, chopping down tough gnarly mesquite trees and digging up their incredibly long roots, and Brill knew that he always followed the same path home. And watching, Brill noted him swerving far aside, seemingly to avoid a low rounded hillock which jutted above the level of the pasture. Lopez went far around this knoll and Brill remembered that the old Mexican always circled it at a distance. And another thing came into Brill's idle mind—Lopez always increased his gait when he was passing the knoll, and he always managed to get by it before sundown—yet Mexican laborers generally worked from the first light of dawn to the last glint of twilight, especially at these grubbing jobs, when they were paid by the acre and not by the day. Brill's curiosity was aroused.

He rose, and sauntering down the slight slope on the crown of which his shack sat, hailed the plodding Mexican.

"Hey, Lopez, wait a minute."

Lopez halted, looked about, and remained motionless but unenthusiastic as the white man approached.

"Lopez," said Brill lazily, "it ain't none of my business, but I just wanted to ask you—how come you always go so far around that old Indian mound?"

"No sabe," grunted Lopez shortly.

"You're a liar," responded Brill genially. "You savvy all right; you speak English as good as me. What's the matter—you think that mound's ha'nted or somethin'?"

Brill could speak Spanish himself and read it, too, but like most Anglo-Saxons he much preferred to speak his own language.

Lopez shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not a good place, *no bueno,"* he muttered, avoiding Brill's eye. "Let hidden things rest."

"I reckon you're scared of ghosts," Brill bantered. "Shucks, if that is an Indian mound, them Indians been dead so

long their ghosts 'ud be plumb wore out by now."

Brill knew that the illiterate Mexicans looked with superstitious aversion on the mounds that are found here and there through the Southwest—relics of a past and forgotten age, containing the moldering bones of chiefs and warriors of a lost race.

"Best not to disturb what is hidden in the earth," grunted Lopez.

"Bosh," said Brill. "Me and some boys busted into one of them mounds over in the Palo Pinto country and dug up pieces of a skeleton with some beads and flint arrowheads and the like. I kept some of the teeth a long time till I lost 'em, and I ain't never been ha'nted."

"Indians?" snorted Lopez unexpectedly. "Who spoke of Indians? There have been more than Indians in this country. In the old times strange things happened here. I have heard the tales of my people, handed down from generation to generation. And my people were here long before yours, Señor Brill."

"Yeah, you're right," admitted Steve. "First white men in this country was Spaniards, of course. Coronado passed along not very far from here, I hear-tell, and Hernando de Estrada's expedition came through here—away back yonder—I dunno how long ago."

"In 1545," said Lopez. "They pitched camp yonder where your corral stands now."

Brill turned to glance at his rail-fenced corral, inhabited now by his saddle-horse, a pair of work-horses and a scrawny cow.

"How come you know so much about it?" he asked curiously.

"One of my ancestors marched with de Estrada," answered Lopez. "A soldier, Porfirio Lopez; he told his son of that expedition, and he told *his* son, and so down the family line to me, who have no son to whom I can tell the tale."

"I didn't know you were so well connected," said Brill. "Maybe you know somethin' about the gold de Estrada was supposed to hid around here somewhere."

"There was no gold," growled Lopez. "De Estrada's soldiers bore only their arms, and they fought their way through hostile country—many left their bones along the trail. Later—many years later—a mule train from Santa Fe was attacked not many miles from here by Comanches and they hid their gold and escaped; so the legends got mixed up. But even their gold is not there now, because Gringo buffalo-hunters found it and dug it up."

BRILL nodded abstractedly, hardly heeding. Of all the continent of North America there is no section so haunted by tales of lost or hidden treasure as is the Southwest. Uncounted wealth passed back and forth over the hills and plains of Texas and New Mexico in the old days when Spain owned the gold and silver mines of the New World and controlled the rich fur trade of the West, and echoes of that wealth linger on in tales of golden caches. Some such vagrant dream, born of failure and pressing poverty, rose in Brill's mind.

Aloud he spoke: "Well, anyway, I got nothin' else to do and I believe I'll dig into that old mound and see what I can find."

The effect of that simple statement on Lopez was nothing short of shocking. He recoiled and his swarthy brown face went ashy; his black eyes flared and he threw up his arms in a gesture of intense expostulation.

"Dios, no!" he cried. "Don't do that, Señor Brill! There is a curse—my grandfather told me——"

"Told you what?" asked Brill.

Lopez lapsed into sullen silence.

"I can not speak," he muttered. "I am sworn to silence. Only to an eldest son could I open my heart. But believe me when I say better had you cut your throat than to break into that accursed mound."

"Well," said Brill, impatient of Mexican superstitions, "if it's so bad why don't you tell me about it? Gimme a logical reason for not bustin' into it."

"I can not speak!" cried the Mexican desperately. "I *know!*—but I swore to silence on the Holy Crucifix, just as every man of my family has sworn. It is a thing so dark, it is to risk damnation even to speak of it! Were I to tell you, I would blast the soul from your body. But I have sworn—and I have no son, so my lips are sealed for ever."

"Aw, well," said Brill sarcastically, "why don't you write it out?"

Lopez started, stared, and to Steve's surprize, caught at the suggestion.

"I will! *Dios* be thanked the good priest taught me to write when I was a child. My oath said nothing of writing. I only swore not to speak. I will write out the whole thing for you, if you will swear not to speak of it afterward, and to destroy the paper as soon as you have read it."

"Sure," said Brill, to humor him, and the old Mexican seemed much relieved.

"*Bueno!* I will go at once and write. Tomorrow as I go to work I will bring you the paper and you will understand why no one must open that accursed mound!"

And Lopez hurried along his homeward path, his stooped shoulders swaying with the effort of his unwonted haste. Steve grinned after him, shrugged his shoulders and turned back toward his own shack. Then he halted, gazing back at the low rounded mound with its grass-grown sides. It must be an Indian tomb, he decided, what of its symmetry and its similarity to other Indian mounds he had seen. He scowled as he tried to figure out the seeming connection between the mysterious knoll and the martial ancestor of Juan Lopez.

BRILL gazed after the receding figure of the old Mexican. A shallow valley, cut by a half-dry creek, bordered with trees and underbrush, lay between Brill's pasture and the low sloping hill beyond which lay Lopez's shack. Among the trees along the creek bank the old Mexican was disappearing. And Brill came to a sudden decision.

Hurrying up the slight slope, he took a pick and a shovel from the tool shed built on to the back of his shack. The sun had not yet set and Brill believed he could open the mound deep enough to determine its nature before dark. If not, he could work by lantern-light. Steve, like most of his breed, lived mostly by impulse, and his present urge was to tear into that mysterious hillock and find what, if anything, was concealed therein. The thought of treasure came again to his mind, piqued by the evasive attitude of Lopez.

What if, after all, that grassy heap of brown earth hid riches—virgin ore from forgotten mines, or the minted coinage of old Spain? Was it not possible that the musketeers of de Estrada had themselves reared that pile above a treasure they could not bear away, molding it in the likeness of an Indian mound to fool seekers? Did old Lopez know that? It would not be strange if, knowing of treasure there, the old Mexican refrained from disturbing it. Ridden with grisly superstitious fears, he might well live out a life of barren toil rather than risk the wrath of lurking ghosts or devils—for the Mexicans say that hidden gold is always ac-

cursed, and surely there was supposed to be some especial doom resting on this mound. Well, Brill meditated, Latin-Indian devils had no terrors for the Anglo-Saxon, tormented by the demons of drouth and storm and crop failure.

Steve set to work with the savage energy characteristic of his breed. The task was no light one; the soil, baked by the fierce sun, was iron-hard, and mixed with rocks and pebbles. Brill sweated profusely and grunted with his efforts, but the fire of the treasure-hunter was on him. He shook the sweat out of his eyes and drove in the pick with mighty strokes that ripped and crumbled the close-packed dirt.

The sun went down, and in the long dreamy summer twilight he worked on, almost oblivious to time or space. He began to be convinced that the mound was a genuine Indian tomb, as he found traces of charcoal in the soil. The ancient people which reared these sepulchers had kept fires burning upon them for days, at some point in the building. All the mounds Steve had ever opened had contained a solid stratum of charcoal a short distance below the surface. But the charcoal traces he found now were scattered about through the soil.

His idea of a Spanish-built treasure-trove faded, but he persisted. Who knows? Perhaps that strange folk men now called Mound-Builders had treasure of their own which they laid away with the dead.

Then Steve yelped in exultation as his pick rang on a bit of metal. He snatched it up and held it close to his eyes, straining in the waning light. It was caked and corroded with rust, worn almost paper-thin, but he knew it for what it was—a spur-rowel, unmistakably Spanish with its long cruel points. And he halted completely bewildered. No Spaniard ever reared this mound, with its undeniable marks of aboriginal workmanship. Yet how came that relic of Spanish caballeros hidden deep in the packed soil?

Brill shook his head and set to work again. He knew that in the center of the mound, if it were indeed an aboriginal tomb, he would find a narrow chamber built of heavy stones, containing the bones of the chief for which the mound had been reared and the victims sacrificed above it. And in the gathering darkness he felt his pick strike heavily against something granite-like and unyielding. Examination, by sense of feel as well as by sight, proved it to be a solid block of stone, roughly hewn. Doubtless it formed one of the ends of the death-chamber. Useless to try to shatter it. Brill chipped and pecked about it, scraping the dirt and pebbles away from the corners until he felt that wrenching it out would be but a matter of sinking the pick-point underneath and levering it out.

But now he was suddenly aware that darkness had come on. In the young moon objects were dim and shadowy. His mustang nickered in the corral whence came the comfortable crunch of tired beasts' jaws on corn. A whippoorwill called eerily from the dark shadows of the narrow winding creek. Brill straightened reluctantly. Better get a lantern and continue his explorations by its light.

He felt in his pocket with some idea of wrenching out the stone and exploring the cavity by the aid of matches. Then he stiffened. Was it imagination that he heard a faint sinister rustling, which seemed to come from behind the blocking stone? Snakes! Doubtless they had holes somewhere about the base of the mound and there might be a dozen big diamond-backed rattlers coiled up in that cave-like interior waiting for him to put his hand among them. He shivered slightly at the

thought and backed away out of the excavation he had made.

It wouldn't do to go poking about blindly into holes. And for the past few minutes, he realized, he had been aware of a faint foul odor exuding from interstices about the blocking stone—though he admitted that the smell suggested reptiles no more than it did any other menacing scent. It had a charnel-house reek about it—gases formed in the chamber of death, no doubt, and dangerous to the living.

Steve laid down his pick and returned to the house, impatient of the necessary delay. Entering the dark building, he struck a match and located his kerosene lantern hanging on its nail on the wall. Shaking it, he satisfied himself that it was nearly full of coal oil, and lighted it. Then he fared forth again, for his eagerness would not allow him to pause long enough for a bite of food. The mere opening of the mound intrigued him, as it must always intrigue a man of imagination, and the discovery of the Spanish spur had whetted his curiosity.

He hurried from his shack, the swinging lantern casting long distorted shadows ahead of him and behind. He chuckled as he visualized Lopez's thoughts and actions when he learned, on the morrow, that the forbidden mound had been pried into. A good thing he opened it that evening, Brill reflected; Lopez might even have tried to prevent him meddling with it, had he known.

In the dreamy hush of the summer night, Brill reached the mound—lifted his lantern—swore bewilderedly. The lantern revealed his excavations, his tools lying carelessly where he had dropped them—and a black gaping aperture! The great blocking stone lay in the bottom of the excavation he had made, as if thrust carelessly aside. Warily he thrust the lantern forward and peered into the small cave-like chamber, expecting to see he knew not what. Nothing met his eyes except the bare rock sides of a long narrow cell, large enough to receive a man's body, which had apparently been built up of roughly hewn square-cut stones, cunningly and strongly joined together.

"Lopez!" exclaimed Steve furiously. "The dirty coyote! He's been watchin' me work—and when I went after the lantern, he snuck up and pried the rock out—and grabbed whatever was in there, I reckon. Blast his greasy hide, I'll fix him!"

Savagely he extinguished the lantern and glared across the shallow, brush-grown valley. And as he looked he stiffened. Over the corner of the hill, on the other side of which the shack of Lopez stood, a shadow moved. The slender moon was setting, the light dim and the play of the shadows baffling. But Steve's eyes were sharpened by the sun and winds of the wastelands, and he knew that it was some two-legged creature that was disappearing over the low shoulder of the mesquite-grown hill.

"Beatin' it to his shack," snarled Brill. "He's shore got somethin' or he wouldn't be travelin' at that speed."

Brill swallowed, wondering why a peculiar trembling had suddenly taken hold of him. What was there unusual about a thieving old Greaser running home with his loot? Brill tried to drown the feeling that there was something peculiar about the gait of the dim shadow, which had seemed to move at a sort of slinking lope. There must have been need for swiftness when stocky old Juan Lopez elected to travel at such a strange pace.

"Whatever he found is as much mine as his," swore Brill, trying to get his mind

off the abnormal aspect of the figure's flight. "I got this land leased and I done all the work diggin'. A curse, heck! No wonder he told me that stuff. Wanted me to leave it alone so he could get it hisself. It's a wonder he ain't dug it up long before this. But you can't never tell about them Spigs."

Brill, as he meditated thus, was striding down the gentle slope of the pasture which led down to the creek-bed. He passed into the shadows of the trees and dense underbrush and walked across the dry creek-bed, noting absently that neither whippoorwill nor hoot-owl called in the darkness. There was a waiting, listening tenseness in the night that he did not like. The shadows in the creek bed seemed too thick, too breathless. He wished he had not blown out the lantern, which he still carried, and was glad he had brought the pick, gripped like a battle-ax in his right hand. He had an impulse to whistle, just to break the silence, then swore and dismissed the thought. Yet he was glad when he clambered up the low opposite bank and emerged into the starlight.

He walked up the slope and onto the hill, and looked down on the mesquite flat wherein stood Lopez's squalid hut. A light showed at the one window.

"Packin' his things for a getaway, I reckon," grunted Steve. "Ow, what the——"

He staggered as from a physical impact as a frightful scream knifed the stillness. He wanted to clap his hands over his ears to shut out the horror of that cry, which rose unbearably and then broke in an abhorrent gurgle.

"Good God!" Steve felt the cold sweat spring out upon him. "Lopez—or somebody——"

Even as he gasped the words he was running down the hill as fast as his long legs could carry him. Some unspeakable horror was taking place in that lonely hut, but he was going to investigate if it meant facing the Devil himself. He tightened his grip on his pick-handle as he ran. Wandering prowlers, murdering old Lopez for the loot he had taken from the mound, Steve thought, and forgot his wrath. It would go hard for any one he caught molesting the old scoundrel, thief though he might be.

He hit the flat, running hard. And then the light in the hut went out and Steve staggered in full flight, bringing up against a mesquite tree with an impact that jolted a grunt out of him and tore his hands on the thorns. Rebounding with a sobbed curse, he rushed for the shack, nerving himself for what he might see—his hair still standing on end at what he had already seen.

Brill tried the one door of the hut and found it bolted. He shouted to Lopez and received no answer. Yet utter silence did not reign. From within came a curious muffled worrying sound, that ceased as Brill swung his pick crashing against the door. The flimsy portal splintered and Brill leaped into the dark hut, eyes blazing, pick swung high for a desperate onslaught. But no sound ruffled the grisly silence, and in the darkness nothing stirred, though Brill's chaotic imagination peopled the shadowed corners of the hut with shapes of horror.

With a hand damp with perspiration he found a match and struck it. Besides himself only old Lopez occupied the hut—old Lopez, stark dead on the dirt floor, arms spread wide like a crucifix, mouth sagging open in a semblance of idiocy, eyes wide and staring with a horror Brill found intolerable. The one window gaped open, showing the method of the slayer's exit—possibly his entrance as well. Brill went to that window and

gazed out warily. He saw only the sloping hillside on one hand and the mesquite flat on the other. He started—was that a hint of movement among the stunted shadows of the mesquites and chaparral—or had he but imagined he glimpsed a dim loping figure among the trees?

He turned back, as the match burned down to his fingers. He lit the old coal oil lamp on the rude table, cursing as he burned his hand. The globe of the lamp was very hot, as if it had been burning for hours.

Reluctantly he turned to the corpse on the floor. Whatever sort of death had come to Lopez, it had been horrible, but Brill, gingerly examining the dead man, found no wound—no mark of knife or bludgeon on him. Wait! There was a thin smear of blood on Brill's questing hand. Searching, he found the source—three or four tiny punctures in Lopez's throat, from which blood had oozed sluggishly. At first he thought they had been inflicted with a stiletto—a thin round edgeless dagger—then he shook his head. He had seen stiletto wounds—he had the scar of one on his own body. These wounds more resembled the bite of some animal—they looked like the marks of pointed fangs.

Yet Brill did not believe they were deep enough to have caused death, nor had much blood flowed from them. A belief, abhorrent with grisly speculations, rose up in the dark corners of his mind—that Lopez had died of fright, and that the wounds had been inflicted either simultaneously with his death, or an instant afterward.

And Steve noticed something else; scattered about on the floor lay a number of dingy leaves of paper, scrawled in the old Mexican's crude hand—he would write of the curse on the mound, he had said. There were the sheets on which he had written, there was the stump of a pencil on the floor, there was the hot lamp globe, all mute witnesses that the old Mexican had been seated at the rough-hewn table writing for hours. Then it was not he who opened the mound-chamber and stole the contents—but who was it, in God's name? And who or what was it that Brill had glimpsed loping over the shoulder of the hill?

Well, there was but one thing to do—saddle his mustang and ride the ten miles to Coyote Wells, the nearest town, and inform the sheriff of the murder.

Brill gathered up the papers. The last was crumpled in the old man's clutching hand and Brill secured it with some difficulty. Then as he turned to extinguish the light, he hesitated, and cursed himself for the crawling fear that lurked at the back of his mind—fear of the shadowy thing he had seen cross the window just before the light was extinguished in the hut. The long arm of the murderer, he thought, reaching for the lamp to put it out, no doubt. What had there been abnormal or inhuman about that vision, distorted though it must have been in the dim lamplight and shadow? As a man strives to remember the details of a nightmare dream, Steve tried to define in his mind some clear reason that would explain why that flying glimpse had unnerved him to the extent of blundering headlong into a tree, and why the mere vague remembrance of it now caused cold sweat to break out on him.

Cursing himself to keep up his courage, he lighted his lantern, blew out the lamp on the rough table, and resolutely set forth, grasping his pick like a weapon. After all, why should certain seemingly abnormal aspects about a sordid murder upset him? Such crimes were abhorrent, but common enough, especially

among Mexicans, who cherished unguessed feuds.

Then as he stepped into the silent star-flecked night he brought up short. From across the creek sounded the sudden soul-shaking scream of a horse in deadly terror—then a mad drumming of hoofs that receded in the distance. And Brill swore in rage and dismay. Was it a panther lurking in the hills—had a monster cat slain old Lopez? Then why was not the victim marked with the scars of fierce hooked talons? *And who extinguished the light in the hut?*

As he wondered, Brill was running swiftly toward the dark creek. Not lightly does a cowpuncher regard the stampeding of his stock. As he passed into the darkness of the brush along the dry creek, Brill found his tongue strangely dry. He kept swallowing, and he held the lantern high. It made but faint impression in the gloom, but seemed to accentuate the blackness of the crowding shadows. For some strange reason, the thought entered Brill's chaotic mind that though the land was new to the Anglo-Saxon, it was in reality very old. That broken and desecrated tomb was mute evidence that the land was ancient to man, and suddenly the night and the hills and the shadows bore on Brill with a sense of hideous antiquity. Here had long generations of men lived and died before Brill's ancestors ever heard of the land. In the night, in the shadows of this very creek, men had no doubt given up their ghosts in grisly ways. With these reflections Brill hurried through the shadows of the thick trees.

He breathed deeply in relief when he emerged from the trees on his own side. Hurrying up the gentle slope to the railed corral, he held up his lantern, investigating. The corral was empty; not even the placid cow was in sight. And the bars were down. That pointed to human agency, and the affair took on a newly sinister aspect. Some one did not intend that Brill should ride to Coyote Wells that night. It meant that the murderer intended making his getaway and wanted a good start on the law, or else—Brill grinned wryly. Far away across a mesquite flat he believed he could still catch the faint and far-away noise of running horses. What in God's name had given them such a fright? A cold finger of fear played shudderingly on Brill's spine.

STEVE headed for the house. He did not enter boldly. He crept clear around the shack, peering shudderingly into the dark windows, listening with painful intensity for some sound to betray the presence of the lurking killer. At last he ventured to open a door and step in. He threw the door back against the wall to find if any one were hiding behind it, lifted the lantern high and stepped in, heart pounding, pick gripped fiercely, his feelings a mixture of fear and red rage. But no hidden assassin leaped upon him, and a wary exploration of the shack revealed nothing.

With a sigh of relief Brill locked the doors, made fast the windows and lighted his old coal oil lamp. The thought of old Lopez lying, a glassy-eyed corpse alone in the hut across the creek, made him wince and shiver, but he did not intend to start for town on foot in the night.

He drew from its hiding-place his reliable old Colt .45, spun the blue steel cylinder and grinned mirthlessly. Maybe the killer did not intend to leave any witnesses to his crime alive. Well, let him come! He—or they—would find a young cowpuncher with a six-shooter less easy prey than an old unarmed Mexican. And that reminded Brill of the papers he had

brought from the hut. Taking care that he was not in line with a window through which a sudden bullet might come, he settled himself to read, with one ear alert for stealthy sounds.

And as he read the crude laborious script, a slow cold horror grew in his soul. It was a tale of fear the old Mexican had scrawled—a tale handed down from generation to generation—a tale of ancient times.

And Brill read of the wanderings of the caballero Hernando de Estrada and his armored pikemen, who dared the deserts of the Southwest when all was strange and unknown. There were some forty-odd soldiers, servants, and masters, at the beginning, the manuscript ran. There was the captain, de Estrada, and the priest, and young Juan Zavilla, and Don Santiago de Valdez—a mysterious nobleman who had been taken off a helplessly floating ship in the Caribbean Sea—all the others of the crew and passengers had died of plague, he had said, and he had cast their bodies overboard. So de Estrada had taken him aboard the ship that was bearing the expedition from Spain, and de Valdez joined them in their explorations.

Brill read something of their wanderings, told in the crude style of old Lopez, as the old Mexican's ancestors had handed down the tale for over three hundred years. The bare written words dimly reflected the terrific hardships the explorers had encountered—drouth, thirst, floods, the desert sandstorms, the spears of hostile redskins. But it was of another peril that old Lopez told—a grisly lurking horror that fell upon the lonely caravan wandering through the immensity of the wild. Man by man they fell and no man knew the slayer. Fear and black suspicion ate at the heart of the expedition like a canker, and their leader knew not where to turn. This they all knew: among them was a fiend in human form.

Men began to draw apart from each other, to scatter along the line of march, and this mutual suspicion, that sought security in solitude, made it easier for the fiend. The skeleton of the expedition staggered through the wilderness, lost, dazed and helpless, and still the unseen horror hung on their flanks, dragging down the stragglers, preying on drowsing sentries and sleeping men. And on the throat of each was found the wounds of pointed fangs that bled the victim white; so the living knew with what manner of evil they had to deal. Men reeled through the wild, calling on the saints, or blaspheming in their terror, fighting frenziedly against sleep, until they fell with exhaustion and sleep stole on them with horror and death.

Suspicion centered on a great black man, a cannibal slave from Calabar. And they put him in chains. But young Juan Zavilla went the way of the rest, and then the priest was taken. But the priest fought off his fiendish assailant and lived long enough to gasp the demon's name to de Estrada. And Brill, shuddering and wide-eyed, read:

". . . And now it was evident to de Estrada that the good priest had spoken the truth, and the slayer was Don Santiago de Valdez, who was a vampire, an undead fiend, subsisting on the blood of the living. And de Estrada called to mind a certain foul nobleman who had lurked in the mountains of Castile since the days of the Moors, feeding off the blood of helpless victims which lent him a ghastly immortality. This nobleman had been driven forth; none knew where he had fled but it was evident that he and Don Santiago were the same man. He had fled Spain by ship, and de Estrada knew that the people of that ship had died,

not by plague as the fiend had represented, but by the fangs of the vampire.

"De Estrada and the black man and the few soldiers who still lived went searching for him and found him stretched in bestial sleep in a clump of chaparral; full-gorged he was with human blood from his last victim. Now it is well known that a vampire, like a great serpent, when well gorged, falls into a deep sleep and may be taken without peril. But de Estrada was at a loss as to how to dispose of the monster, for how may the dead be slain? For a vampire is a man who has died long ago, yet is quick with a certain foul unlife.

"The men urged that the Caballero drive a stake through the fiend's heart and cut off his head, uttering the holy words that would crumple the long-dead body into dust, but the priest was dead and de Estrada feared that in the act the monster might waken.

"So they took Don Santiago, lifting him softly, and bore him to an old Indian mound near by. This they opened, taking forth the bones they found there, and they placed the vampire within and sealed up the mound—*Dios* grant until Judgment Day.

"It is a place accursed, and I wish I had starved elsewhere before I came into this part of the country seeking work—for I have known of the land and the creek and the mound with its terrible secret, ever since childhood; so you see, Señor Brill, why you must not open the mound and wake the fiend——"

There the manuscript ended with an erratic scratch of the pencil that tore the crumpled leaf.

BRILL rose, his heart pounding wildly, his face bloodless, his tongue cleaving to his palate. He gagged and found words.

"That's why the spur was in the mound—one of them Spaniards dropped it while they was diggin'—and I mighta knowed it'd been dug into before, the way the charcoal was scattered out—but, good God——"

Aghast he shrank from the black visions—an undead monster stirring in the gloom of his tomb, thrusting from within to push aside the stone loosened by the pick of ignorance—a shadowy shape loping over the hill toward a light that betokened a human prey—a frightful long arm that crossed a dim-lighted window. . . .

"It's madness!" he gasped. "Lopez was plumb loco! They ain't no such things as vampires! If they is, why didn't he get me first, instead of Lopez—unless he was scoutin' around, makin' sure of everything before he pounced? Aw, hell! It's all a pipe-dream——"

The words froze in his throat. At the window a face glared and gibbered soundlessly at him. Two icy eyes pierced his very soul. A shriek burst from his throat and that ghastly visage vanished. But the very air was permeated by the foul scent that had hung about the ancient mound. And now the door creaked—bent slowly inward. Brill backed up against the wall, his gun shaking in his hand. It did not occur to him to fire through the door; in his chaotic brain he had but one thought—that only that thin portal of wood separated him from some horror born out of the womb of night and gloom and the black past. His eyes were distended as he saw the door give, as he heard the staples of the bolt groan.

The door burst inward. Brill did not scream. His tongue was frozen to the roof of his mouth. His fear-glazed eyes took in the tall, vulture-like form—the icy eyes, the long black finger nails—the moldering garb, hideously ancient—the long spurred boots—the slouch hat with

its crumbling feather—the flowing cloak that was falling to slow shreds. Framed in the black doorway crouched that abhorrent shape out of the past, and Brill's brain reeled. A savage cold radiated from the figure—the scent of moldering clay and charnel-house refuse. And then the undead came at the living like a swooping vulture.

Brill fired point-blank and saw a shred of rotten cloth fly from the Thing's breast. The vampire reeled beneath the impact of the heavy ball, then righted himself and came on with frightful speed. Brill reeled back against the wall with a choking cry, the gun falling from his nerveless hand. The black legends were true then—human weapons were powerless—for may a man kill one already dead for long centuries, as mortals die?

Then the claw-like hands at his throat roused the young cowpuncher to a frenzy of madness. As his pioneer ancestors fought hand to hand against brain-shattering odds, Steve Brill fought the cold dead crawling thing that sought his life and his soul.

Of that ghastly battle Brill never remembered much. It was a blind chaos in which he screamed beast-like, tore and slugged and hammered, where long black nails like the talons of a panther tore at him, and pointed teeth snapped again and again at his throat. Rolling and tumbling about the room, both half enveloped by the musty folds of that ancient rotting cloak, they smote and tore at each other among the ruins of the shattered furniture, and the fury of the vampire was not more terrible than the fear-crazed desperation of his victim.

They crashed headlong into the table, knocking it down upon its side, and the coal oil lamp splintered on the floor, spraying the walls with sudden flame. Brill felt the bite of the burning oil that spattered him, but in the red frenzy of the fight he gave no heed. The black talons were tearing at him, the inhuman eyes burning icily into his soul; between his frantic fingers the withered flesh of the monster was hard as dry wood. And wave after wave of blind madness swept over Steve Brill. Like a man battling a nightmare he screamed and smote, while all about them the fire leaped up and caught at the walls and roof.

Through darting jets and licking tongues of flame they reeled and rolled like a demon and a mortal warring on the fire-lanced floors of hell. And in the growing tumult of the flames, Brill gathered himself for one last volcanic burst of frenzied strength. Breaking away and staggering up, gasping and bloody, he lunged blindly at the foul shape and caught it in a grip not even the vampire could break. And whirling his fiendish assailant bodily on high, he dashed him down across the uptilted edge of the fallen table as a man might break a stick of wood across his knee. Something cracked like a snapping branch and the vampire fell from Brill's grasp to writhe in a strange broken posture on the burning floor. Yet it was not dead, for its flaming eyes still burned on Brill with a ghastly hunger, and it strove to crawl toward him with its broken spine, as a dying snake crawls.

Brill, reeling and gasping, shook the blood from his eyes, and staggered blindly through the broken door. And as a man runs from the portals of hell, he ran stumblingly through the mesquite and chaparral until he fell from utter exhaustion. Looking back he saw the flame of the burning house and thanked God that it would burn until the very bones of Don Santiago de Valdez were utterly consumed and destroyed from the knowledge of men.

"He dragged him back to the shelter of the passageway's arched entrance."

The Devil's Bride

By SEABURY QUINN

An astounding novel of devil-worship and the infamous Black Mass—the Mass of St. Secaire

The Story Thus Far

BEAUTIFUL Alice Hume vanished during the final rehearsal for her wedding in the presence of her fiancé and a group of friends including her mother, her family physician, Doctor Samuel Trowbridge, and Trowbridge's eccentric associate, the French physician-detective, Doctor Jules de Grandin. The little Frenchman discovered traces of a yellow powder which, he explained to Trowbridge, was *bulala-gwai,* the "little death" used by the natives of the French Congo to produce temporary paralysis. Alice, he declared, had been abducted while the wedding party was rendered unconscious by *bulala-gwai.*

De Grandin also believed that the dis-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for February.

appearance was connected with a girdle of tanned human skin that Alice had worn. The girl told him that the belt was known as "the luck of the Humes" and had been in the family a long time.

He found a concealed document in the family Bible, written by Alice's ancestor, David Hume, and relating how he had been sold as a slave to the devil-worshipping Yezidees, had rescued the daughter of their chief from becoming the "bride of Satan," had married her, and later brought her to America.

Despite a sentence in the old manuscript warning Hume's descendants that an attempt might some time be made to "bring home" one of the daughters of his line, Alice's mother refused to admit any connection between the Yezidee legend and her daughter's disappearance. But that very night Mrs. Hume was found murdered by a strangling-cord in her own boudoir.

A young, unbaptized boy was spirited away from a near-by Baptist home, and a veiled lady, who had turned against the Yezidees, was abducted from jail and crucified in the garden of a convent before de Grandin had obtained from her the information he wanted.

Inspector Renouard of the French secret service arrived from overseas on the trail of the Yezidees and joined de Grandin and Sergeant Costello of the local police. At once they were startled by the case of a young woman whom the Yezidees had blinded and cut off her hands and her tongue because she had witnessed the crucifixion.

Before she died de Grandin obtained from her a good description of her assailants. Reinforced by a squad of police, de Grandin and Renouard penetrated into the temple of the devil-worshippers while they were celebrating the Black Mass.

14. The Serpent's Lair

HANGINGS of dark-red stuff draped loosely from the ceiling of the hall, obscuring doors and windows, their folds undulating eerily, like fluttering cerements of unclean phantoms. Candles like votive lights flickered in cups of red glass at intervals round the walls, their tiny, lambent flames diluting rather than dispelling the darkness which hovered like vapor in the air. Only in one spot was there light. At the farther end of the draped room was an altar shaped in imitation of the Gothic sanctuary of a church, and round this blazed a mass of tall black candles which splashed a luminous pool on the deep red drugget covering the floor and altar-steps. Above the altar was set a crucifix, reversed, so that the thorn-crowned head was down, the nail-pierced feet above, and back of this a reredos of scarlet cloth was hung, the image of a strutting peacock appliqued on it in flashing sequins. On the table of the altar lay a long cushion of red velvet, tufted like a mattress. Two ranks of backless benches had been set transversely in the hall, a wide center aisle between them, smaller aisles to right and left, and on these the congregation sat in strained expectancy, each member muffled in a hooded gown so that it was impossible to distinguish the features, or even the sex, of a given individual.

A faint odor of incense permeated the close atmosphere; not sweet incense, such as churches use, but something with a bitter, pungent tang to it, and—it seemed to me—more than a hint of the subtle, maddening aroma of burnt cannabis, the *bhang* with which fanatics of the East intoxicate themselves before they run amok. But through the odor of the incense was another smell, the heavy smell of paraffin, as though some careless person had let fall an open tank of it, soaking the thick

floor-covering before the error could be rectified.

Somewhere unseen to us, perhaps behind the faintly fluttering draperies on the walls, an organ was playing very softly as Renouard, de Grandin and I stole quickly through the curtained doorway of the anteroom and, unobserved, took places on the rearmost bench.

Here and there a member of the congregation gave vent to a soft sigh of suppressed anticipation and excitement, once or twice peaked cowls were bent together as their wearers talked in breathless whispers; but for the most part the assemblage sat erect in stony silence, motionless, yet eager as a flock of hooded vultures waiting for the kill which is to furnish them their feast.

An unseen gong chimed softly as we took our seats, its soft, resonant tones penetrating the dark room like a sudden shaft of daylight let into a long-closed cellar, and the congregation rose as one, standing with hands clasped before them and heads demurely bowed. A curtain by the altar was pushed back, and through the opening three figures glided. The first was tall and gaunt, with a Slavic type of face, wild, fantastic eyes and thick, fair hair; the second was young, still in his early twenties, with the lithe, free carriage, fiery glance and swarthy complexion of the nomadic races of southeastern Europe or western Asia. The third was a small, frail, aged man—that is, he seemed so at first glance. A second look left doubt both of his frailty and age. His face was old, long, thin and deeply etched with wrinkles, hard-shaven like an actor's or a priest's and in it burned a pair of big, sad eyes—eyes like Lucifer's as he broods upon the high estate from which he fell. His mouth was tight-lipped, but very red, drooping at the corners, the mouth of an ascetic turned voluptuary. His body, in odd contrast to his face, seemed curiously youthful, erect and vigorous in carriage; a strange and somehow terrifying contrast, it seemed to me. All three were robed in gowns of scarlet fashioned like monks' habits, with hooded capes pendant at the back and knotted cords of black about the waist. On the breast of each was blazoned an inverted passion cross in black; each had a tonsure shaven on his head; each wore red-leather sandals on his feet.

A gentle rustling sounded as the trio stepped into the circle of light before the altar, a soughing of soft sighs as the audience gave vent to its pent-up emotion.

The old-young man moved quickly toward the altar, his two attendants at his elbows, sank to one knee before it in humble genuflection; then, like soldiers at command to wheel, they turned to face the congregation. The two attendants folded hands before them, bringing the loose cuffs of their sleeves together; the other advanced a pace, raised his left hand as though in benediction and murmured: *"Gloria tibi, Lucifero!"*

"Gloria tibi, Lucifero!" intoned the congregation in a low-voiced chant.

"Praise we now our Lord the Peacock, Melek Taos, Angel Peacock of our Lord the Prince of Darkness!" came the chanted invocation of the red priest.

"Hail and glory, laud and honor, O our Lord, great Melek Taos!" responded the auditors.

"Let us not forget the Serpent, who aforetime in the Garden undertook the Master's bidding and from bondage to the Tyrant freed our parents, Eve and Adam!" the red priest admonished.

"Hail thee, Serpent, who aforetime in the Garden men call Eden, from the bondage of the Tyrant freed our parents, Eve and Adam!" cried the congregation,

a wave of fervor running through them like fire among the withered grass in autumn.

The red priest and his acolytes wheeled sharply to the left and marched beyond the limits of the lighted semicircle made by the altar candles, and suddenly the hidden organ, which had been playing a sort of soft improvisation, changed its tune. Now it sang a slow andante strain, rising and falling with persistent, pulsating quavers like the almost tuneless airs which Eastern fakirs play upon their pipes when the serpents rise to "dance" upon their tails.

And as the tremulous melody burst forth the curtains parted once again and a girl ran out into the zone of candlelight. For a moment she poised on tiptoe, and a gasp of savage and incredulous delight came from the company. Very lovely she was, violet-eyed, daffodil-haired, with a body white as petals of narcissi dancing in the wind. Her costume gleamed and glittered in the flickering candlelight, encasing her slim frame from hips to armpits like a coiled green hawser. It was a fifteen-foot live boa constrictor!

As she moved lithely through the figures of her slow, gliding dance to the sensuous accompaniment of the organ, the great reptile loosed its hold upon her torso and waved its hideous, wedge-shaped head back and forth in perfect time. Its glistening, scaly head caressed her cheek, its lambent forked tongue shot forth to meet her red, voluptuous mouth.

Gradually the wailing minor of the organ began to quicken. The girl spun round and round upon her toes, and with that odd trick which we have of noting useless trifles at such times, I saw that the nails of her feet had been varnished to a gleaming pink, like the nails of a hand, and as she danced they cast back twinkling coral-toned reflections of the candles' flames. The great snake seemed to waken. Silently, swiftly, its sleek body extended, flowing like a stream of molten green metal about the girl, slithering from her bare white breast to her bare white feet, then knotting once again about her hips and waist like a gleaming girdle of death. Round and round she whirled like a lovely animated top, her grisly partner holding her in firm embrace. Finally, as the music slowed once more, she fell exhausted to the carpet, and the snake again entwined itself about her body, its devilish head raised above her heaving shoulders, its beady eyes and flickering tongue shooting silent challenge to the world to take her from it.

The music still whined on with insistent monotone, and the girl rose slowly to her knees, bowed to the altar till her forehead touched the floor and signed herself with the cross—in reverse, beginning at her breast and ending at her brow. Then, tottering wearily beneath the burden of the great snake's weight, she staggered through the opening between the swaying curtains.

The organ's wailing ceased, and from the shadow-shrouded rear of the hall there came the low intoning of a chant. The music was Gregorian, but the words were indistinguishable. Then came the high, sweet chiming of a sacring bell, and all the audience fell down upon their knees, heads bowed, hands clasped, as a solemn, robed procession filed up the aisle.

First marched the crucifer, arrayed in scarlet cassock and white surplice—and what a crucifix he bore! The rood was in reverse, the *corpus* hung head-downward, and at the staff-head perched the image of a strutting peacock, its silver overlaid with bright enamel, simulating

the natural gaudy colors of the bird. Next came two men in crimson cassocks, each with a tall black candle flickering in his hand, and then a man who bore a staff of silver bells, which chimed and tinkled musically. Two other surpliced acolytes came next, walking slowly backward and swinging censers which belched forth clouds of pungent smoke. Finally the red priest, now clothed in full canonicals, chasuble, alb and amice, while at his elbows walked his two attendants in the dalmatic and tunicle of deacon and subdeacon.

Two by two behind the men there came a column of girls garbed in a sort of conventual habit — long, loose-cuffed sleeves, full skirts reaching to the ankle, high, cope-like collars—all of brilliant scarlet embroidered with bright orange figures which waved like flickering flames as the garments swayed. The gowns were belted at the waist, but open at the throat, leaving chest and bust uncovered, and disclosing on each breast the same symbol we had seen on Abigail Kimble's white flesh. Upon their heads they wore tall caps of stiff red linen, shaped somewhat like a bishop's miter and surmounted by the silver image of a peacock. As they walked sedately in the wake of the red priest their bare white feet showed with startling contrast to the deep red of their habits and the dark tones of the carpet.

A brazen pot of glowing charcoal was swung from a long rod borne by the first two women, while the next two carried cushions of red plush on which there lay some instruments of gleaming metal. The final members of the column were armed with scarlet staves which they held together at the tips, forming a sort of open arbor over a slight figure swathed in veils which marched with slow and faltering steps.

"Morbleu," de Grandin whispered in my ear, *"une prosélyte!* Can such things be?"

His surmise was correct. Before the altar the procession halted, spread out fanwise, with the veiled girl in their midst. The women set their fire-pot on the altar steps and blew upon the embers with a bellows till they glowed with sudden life. Then into the red nest of coals they put the shining instruments and stood back, waiting, a sort of awful eagerness upon their faces.

"Do what thou wilt; this shall be the whole of the law!" the red priest chanted.

"Love is the law; love free and unbound," the congregation intoned.

"Do what thou wilt shall be the law," the priest repeated; "therefore be ye goodly, dress ye in all fine raiment, eat rich foods and drink sweet wines, even wines that foam. Also take thy fill of love, when and with whom ye will. Do what thou wilt; this is the law."

The women gathered round the kneeling convert, screening her from view, as the red priest called:

"Is not this better than the death-in-life of slaves who serve the Slave-God and go oppressed with consciousness of sin, vainly striving after tedious virtues? *There is no sin*—do what thou wilt; that is the law!"

The red-robed women started back and left the space before the altar open. In the candle-lighted clearing, the altar lights reflected in the jewels which glimmered in her braided hair, knelt the convert, stripped of her enshrouding veils, clad only in her own white beauty. The red priest turned, took something from the glowing fire-pot——

A short, half-strangled exclamation broke from the kneeling girl as she half started to her feet, but three watchful red-robed women sprang upon her, seized

her wrists and head, and held her rigid while the priest pressed the glowing branding-iron tight against her breast, then with a deftness which denoted practise, took a second tool and forced it first against one cheek, then the other.

The branded girl groaned and writhed within her guardians' grasp, but they held her firmly till the ordeal was finished, then raised her, half fainting, to her feet and put a crimson robe on her, a yellow sash about her waist and a crimson miter on her head.

"Scarlet Women of the Apocalypse, behold your sister—Scarlet Woman, you who have put behind you consciousness of right and wrong, look on the others of your sisterhood!" the red priest cried. "Show them the sign, that all may know that which ye truly are!"

Now pride, perhaps the consciousness that all connection with religious teaching had been cut, seemed to revive the almost swooning girl. Though tears still glinted on her eyelids from the torment she had undergone, a wild, bold recklessness shone in her handsome face as she stood forth before the other wearers of the brand and pridefully, like a queen, drew back her ruddy robe, displaying the indelible signs of evil stamped upon her flesh. Her chin was raised, her eyes glowed through their tears with haughty pride as she revealed the symbols of her covenant with hell.

The little silver bells burst forth into a peal of admonition. Priest and people dropped upon their knees as the curtains by the altar were drawn back and another figure stepped into the zone of candlelight.

Slowly, listlessly, almost like one walking in a dream, she stepped. A long and sleeveless smock of yellow satin, thickset with red figures of dancing demons, hung loosely from her shoulders. A sort of uræus fashioned like a peacock was set crown-like on her head, rings set with fiery gems glowed on every toe and finger, great ruby pendants dangled from her ears. She seemed a very Queen in Babylon as she proceeded to the altar between the ranks of groveling priests and women and sank to her knees, then rose and signed herself with the cross, beginning at the breast and ending at the brow.

A whispered ripple which became a wave ran rapidly from lip to lip: "It's she; the Queen, the Prophetess, the Bride-Elect! She has graced us with her presence!"

De Grandin murmured something in my ear, but I did not hear him. My other senses seemed paralyzed as my gaze held with unbelieving horror to the woman standing at the altar. The Queen—the Devil's Bride-Elect—was Alice Hume.

15. The Mass of St. Sécaire

PREPARATIONS for the sacrilegious sacrament had been carefully rehearsed. For a long moment Alice stood erect before the altar, head bowed, hands clasped beneath her chin; then parting her hands and raising them palm-forward to the level of her temples, she dropped as though forced downward by invincible pressure, and we heard the softly thudding impact as she flung herself prostrate and beat her brow and palms against the crimson altar-carpet in utter self-abasement.

"Is all prepared?" the red priest called as, flanked by deacon and sub-deacon, he paused before the altar steps.

"Not yet; we make the sanctuary ready!" two of the scarlet-robed women returned in chorus as they stepped forward, bent and raised Alice Hume between them. Quickly, like skilled tiring women working at their trade, they lifted

off her yellow robe with its decorations of gyrating devils, drew the glinting ruby rings from her toes and fingers, unhooked the flashing pendants from the holes bored through her ears. Then they unloosed her hair, and as the cloven tide of silken tresses rippled down, took her by the hands and led her slowly up the stairway to the altar. There one of them crouched to the floor, forming herself into a living stepping-stone, while, assisted by the other, Alice trod upon her back, mounted to the altar and laid her white form supine on the long, red cushion. Then, ankles crossed and hands with upturned palms laid flaccidly beside her, she closed her eyes and lay as still as any carven statue. They put the sacred vessels on her breast, the golden chalice thick-inlaid with gems, the heavy, hand-chased paten with its freight of small, red wafers, and the yellow plate shone brightly in the candlelight, its reflection casting halos of pale gold upon the ivory flesh.

The red priest mounted quickly to the altar, genuflected with his back to it, and called out: *"Introibo ad altare Dei*—I will go up into the altar of God."

Rapidly the rite proceeded. The fifty-second Psalm—*quid gloriaris*—was said, but blasphemously garbled, God's name deleted and the Devil's substituted, so that it read: "Why boastest thou thyself, thou tyrant, that thou canst do mischief, whereas the evilness of Satan endureth yet daily?"

Then came confession, and, as *oremus te Domine* was intoned the priest bowed and kissed the living altar as provided by the rubric. Again, repeating *Dominus vobiscum*, he pressed a burning kiss upon the shrinking flesh.

The subdeacon took a massive black-bound book and bore it to the deacon, who swung the censer over it; then, while the other held it up before him, he read aloud:

"In the beginning God created seven spirits as a man lighteth one lamp from another, and of these Lucifer, whose true name is forbidden to pronounce, was chiefest. But he, offended by the way in which God treated His creations, rebelled against the Tyrant, but by treachery was overthrown.

"Therefore was he expelled from heaven, but seized dominion of the earth and air, which he retaineth to this day. And those who worship him and do him honor will have the joys of life all multiplied to them, and at the last shall dwell with him in that eternal place which is his own, where they shall have dominion over hosts of demons pledged to do their will.

"Choose ye, therefore, man; choose ye whether ye will have the things of earth added to an endless authority in hell, or whether ye will submit to the will of the Tyrant of the Skies, have sorrow upon earth and everlasting slavery in the world to come."

The deacon and subdeacon put the book aside, crossing themselves in reverse, and the call came mockingly: "May our sins be multiplied through the words contained in this Gospel."

The red priest raised the paten high above the living altar, intoning: *"Suscipe sancte Pater hanc immaculatum hostiam——"*

De Grandin fumbled underneath his robe. "Renouard, my friend," he whispered, "do you go tell the good Costello to come quickly. These cursed curtains round the walls, I fear they will shut in my whistle's sound, and we must have aid at once. Quickly, my friend, a life depends on it!"

Renouard slipped from his place and crept toward the door, put back the curtain with a stealthy hand, and started back dismayed. Across the doorway we had entered a barrier was drawn, an iron

guard-door intended to hold back flames should the building catch afire.

What had occurred was obvious. Recovered from the blow de Grandin dealt him, the seneschal had struggled from his bonds and barred the portal, then—could it be possible that he had gone unseen behind the screen of curtains hanging from the walls and warned the others of our presence?

De Grandin and Renouard reached for their firearms, fumbling with the unfamiliar folds of their disguises. . . .

Before a weapon could be drawn we were assaulted from behind, our elbows pinioned to our sides, lengths of coiling cords wound tightly around our bodies. In less than half a minute we were helpless, firmly bound and set once more in our places on the bench. Silently and swiftly as a serpent twines its coils about a luckless rabbit our assailants did their work, and only they and we, apparently, knew what occurred. Certainly the hellish ritual at the altar never faltered, nor did a member of the congregation turn round to see what passed behind.

Two women of the Scarlet Sisterhood had crept back of the curtains by the altar. Now they emerged, bearing between them a little, struggling boy, a naked, chubby little fellow who fought and kicked and offered such resistance as his puny strength allowed and called out to his "Daddy" and his "Mamma" to save him from his captors.

Down on the altar steps they flung the little boy; one woman seized his little, dimpled hands, the other took his feet, extending his small body to its greatest length. The deacon and subdeacon had stepped forward. . . .

I shut my eyes and bowed my head, but my ears I could not stop, and so I heard the red priest chant: "*Hic est enim calix sanguinis mea*—this is the chalice of my blood——" I smelled the perfume of the incense, strong, acrid, sweet, yet bitterly revolting, mounting to my brain like some accursed Oriental drug; I heard the wail which slowly grew in volume, yet which had a curiously muffled quality about it, the wail which ended in a little strangling, suffocated bleat!

I knew! Though not a Catholic, I had attended mass with Catholic friends too often not to know. The priest had said the sacred words of intention, and in a church the deacon would pour wine, the subdeacon water in the chalice. But this was not a church; this was a temple dedicated to the Devil, and mingled with the red wine was no water. . . . A bitter memory of my childhood hurried back across the years: They'd given me a lamb when I was five years old, all summer I had made a pet of it, I loved the gentle, woolly thing. The autumn came, and with it came the time for slaughter . . . that agonizing, strangling bleat! That blood-choked cry of utter anguish!

Another sound cut in. The red priest once again was chanting, this time in a language which I could not understand, a ringing, sonorous tongue, yet with something wrong about it. Syllables which should have been noble in their cadences were clipped and twisted in their endings.

And now *another voice*—an abominably guttural voice with a note of hellish chuckling laughter in it—was answering the priest, still in that unknown tongue. It rose and fell, gurgled and chuckled obscenely, and though its volume was not great it seemed to fill the place as rumbling thunder fills the summer sky.

Sweat broke out on my forehead. Luckily for me I had been seated by my captors; otherwise I should have fallen where I stood. As surely as I knew my heart was hammering against my ribs, I knew the voice of incarnate evil was speaking in that curtained room—with

my own ears I heard the Devil answering his votary!

Two red-robed priestesses advanced, one from either side of the altar. Each bore a ewer of heavy hammered brass, and even in the candles' changing light I saw the figures on the vessels were of revolting nastiness, beasts, men and women in attitudes of unspeakable obscenity. The deacon and subdeacon took the vessels from the women's hands and knelt before the priest, who dropped upon his knees with outspread hands and upturned face a moment, then rose and took the chalice from the human altar's gently heaving breast and held it out before him as a third red nun came forward, bearing in her outstretched hands a queer, teapot-like silver vessel.

I say a teapot, for that is what it most resembled when I saw it first. Actually, it was a pitcher made of silver, very brightly polished, shaped to represent a strutting peacock with fanned-out tail and erected crest, its neck outstretched. The bird's beak formed the spout of the strange pitcher, and a funnel-shaped opening in the back between the wings permitted liquids to be poured into it.

The contents of the chalice, augmented and diluted by ruby liquors from the ewers which the women brought, were poured into the peacock-pitcher—a quart or so, I estimated—and the red priest flung the chalice by contemptuously and raised the new container high above his head, so that its polished sides and ruby eyes flung back the altar candles' lights in myriad darting rays.

"Vile, detestable wretches—miscreants!" de Grandin whispered hoarsely. "They mingle blood of innocents, my friends; the wine which represents *le précieux sang de Dieu* and the lifeblood of that little baby boy whose throat they cut and drained a moment hence! *Parbleu,* they shall pay through the nose for this if Jules de Grandin——"

The red priest's deep voice boomed an invitation: "Ye who do truly and earnestly repent you of all your good deeds, and intend to lead a new life of wickedness, draw nigh and take this unholy sacrament to your souls' damnation, devoutly kneeling!"

The congregation rose and ranged themselves upon their knees in a semicircle round the altar. From each to each the red priest strode, thrusting the peacock's hollow beak into each opened mouth, decanting mingled wine and blood.

"You see?" de Grandin's almost soundless whisper came to me. "They study to give insult to the end. They make the cross-sign in reverse, the crucifix they have turned upside-down; when they administer their sacrament of hell they give the wine before the wafer, mocking both the Anglican and Latin rites. *Saligauds!*"

The ceremony proceeded to *"ite missa est,"* when the celebrant suddenly seized a handful of red, triangular wafers from the paten and flung them broadcast out upon the floor. Pandemonium best describes the scene that followed. Those who have seen a group of urchins scrambling for coins tossed by some prankish tourist can vision how that audience of gowned and hooded worshippers of Satan clawed and fought for fragments of the host, groveled on the floor, snatching, scratching, grasping for the smallest morsel of the wafer, which, when obtained, they popped into their mouths and chewed with noisy mastication, then spat forth with exclamations of disgust and cries of foul insult.

As the guards who stood behind us joined the swinish scramble for the desecrated host, de Grandin suddenly lurched forward, hunched his shoulders,

then straightened like a coiling spring released from tension. Supple as an eel —and as muscular—he needed but the opportunity to wriggle from the ligatures which lashed his elbows to his sides.

"Quick, my friends, the haste!" he whispered, drawing his sharp Gurkha knife and slashing at our bonds. "We must——"

"*Les gendarmes*—the police!"

The fire-door leading to the anteroom banged back as the hooded warder rushed into the hall, screaming his warnings. He turned, slammed the door behind him, then drew a heavy chain across it, snapping a padlock through its links. "They come—*les gendarmes!*" he repeated hysterically.

The red priest barked a sharp command, and like sailors trained to spring to quarters when the bugles sound alarm, some half-dozen Satanists rushed to the walls, upset the guttering votive lamps, then scuttled toward the altar. Their companions already had disappeared behind the curtains hanging round the shrine.

"*Qui est*——" Renouard began, but de Grandin cut him short.

"Quickly, for your lives!" he cried, seizing us by the elbows and forcing us before him.

Now we understood the heavy, sickening smell of kerosene which hovered in the room. From top to hem the shrouding curtains at the walls were soaked in it, requiring but the touch of fire to burst into inextinguishable flame. Already they were blazing fiercely where the upset lamps had lighted them, and the heavy, suffocating smoke of burning oil was spreading like mephitic vapor through the room. In a moment the place would be a raging hell of fire.

Beyond the heavy fire-door we heard Costello's peremptory hail: "Open up here; open in th' law's name, or we'll break th' door!" Then the thunder of nightsticks on the steel-sheathed panels, finally the trap-drum staccato of machine-gun bullets rattling on the metal barricade.

Too late to look for help that way, we knew. The door was latched and bolted, and barred with a locked chain, and a geyser of live flame was spurting upward round it, for the wooden walls were now ablaze, outlining the fire-proof door in a frame of death.

Now the oil-soaked carpet had begun to burn; red tongues of flame and curling snakes of smoke were darting hungrily about our feet.

"On!" cried de Grandin, "it is the only way! They must have planned this method of defense in case of raid; surely they have left a rathole for their own escape!"

His guess seemed right, for only round the altar were the flames held back, though even there they were beginning to make progress.

Sleeves held before our faces for such poor protection as they gave, we stumbled toward the altar through the choking smoke. A big, cowled man rose out of nowhere in my path and aimed a blow at me. Scarce knowing what I did I struck at him, felt the sharp point of my hunting-knife sink into the soft flesh of his axilla, felt the warm blood spurt upon my hand as his artery was severed, and —rushed on. I was no longer Samuel Trowbridge, staid, middle-aged practitioner of medicine. I was not even a man. I was a snarling, elemental beast, alive to only one desire, to save myself at any cost; to butcher anything that barred my path.

We lurched and stumbled up the stairway leading to the altar, for there the smoke was somewhat thinner, the flames a trifle less intense. "*Succès,*" de Grandin cried, "the way lies here, my friends—

this is the exit from their *sacré* burrow! Follow on; I can already see——

"Qui diable?" He started back, his pistol flashing in the firelight.

Behind the altar, looming dimly through the swirling smoke, a man's shape bulked. One glance identified him. It was the big, young, white-haired man Costello had knocked unconscious to save Renouard an hour or so before.

In his arms he held the fainting form of Alice Hume.

16. *Framed*

"HANDS up!" de Grandin barked. "Elevate your hands, or——"

"Don't be an utter ass," the other advised tartly. "Can't you see my hands are full?" Displaying no more respect for the Frenchman's pistol than if it had been a pointed finger, he turned on his heel, then flung across his shoulder as a sort of afterthought, "If you want to save your hides a scorching you'd best be coming this way. There's a stairway here —at least, there was fifteen minutes ago."

"Fanons d'un corbeau, he is cool, this one!" de Grandin muttered with grudging admiration, treading close upon the stranger's heels.

Sandwiched between our building and the next was a narrow, spiral stairway, a type of covered fire escape long since declared illegal by the city. Down this the stranger led us, de Grandin close behind him, his pistol ready, his flashlight playing steadily on the other's back. "One false step and I fire," he warned as we descended the dark staircase.

"Oh be quiet," snapped our guide. "One false step and I'll break my silly neck! Don't talk so much, you make me nervous."

Two paces ahead of us, he paused at the stairway's bottom, kicked a metal fire-door open, then drew aside to let us pass. We found ourselves in a narrow alleyway, darker than a moonless midnight, but with a single feeble spot of light diluting the blackness at its farther end, where the weak rays of a flickering gas street lamp battled with the gloom.

"Now what?" the little Frenchman asked. "Why do we stand here like a flock of silly sheep afraid to enter through a gate? Why——"

"S-s-st!" our guide's sharp hiss shut him off. "I think they're waiting for us out there, they—*ha?* I knew it!"

The faintly glowing reflection of the street lamp's light was shut off momentarily as a man's form bulked in the alley exit.

De Grandin tapped me on the arm. *"Elle est nue*—she has no protection from the chill," he whispered with a nod toward Alice. "Will you not put your robe upon her? I shall require mine for disguise a little longer, or——"

"All right," I answered, slipping off my scarlet cassock and draping it about the girl's nude loveliness while the man who held her in his arms assisted me with quick, deft hands.

"Dimitri—Franz?" a voice called cautiously from the alley entrance. "Are you there? Have you brought the Bride?"

For a moment we were silent, then: "Yes," our companion answered thickly, as though he spoke with something in his mouth, "she's here, but——"

His answer broke abruptly, and I felt rather than saw him shift the girl's weight to his left arm as he fumbled under his coat with his right hand.

"But what?" the hail came sharply. "Is she injured? You know the penalty if harm comes to her. Come here!"

"Here, take her," the stranger whispered, thrusting Alice into my arms. To de Grandin: "How about that pistol you've been so jolly anxious to shoot off; got it ready?"

"Certainement. Et puis?" the Frenchman answered.

"All right; look lively—this way!"

Silently as shadows the three of them, de Grandin, the stranger and Renouard, crept down the alley, leaving me to follow with the fainting girl as best I could.

Just inside the entrance to the passageway the stranger spoke again: "The Bride is safe, but——" Once more his thick speech halted; then, "Franz is hurt; he can not walk well, and——"

"Then kill him, and be quick!" the sharp command came back. "None must fall into their hands alive. Quick; shoot him, and bring the Bride; the car is waiting!"

A muffled shot sounded, followed by a groan, then:

"Bring the Prophetess at once!" came the angry command. "What are you waiting for——"

"Only for you, old thing!" With a booming shout of mingled exultation and hilarity, the strange man leaped suddenly from the shadow of the alley's mouth, seized his interrogator in his arms and dragged him back to the shelter of the passageway's arched entrance.

"Hold him, Frenchy!" he commanded. "Don't let him get away; he's——"

A spurting dart of flame stabbed through the darkness and a sharp report was followed by the vicious *whin-n-ng!* of a ricocheting bullet which glanced from the vaulted roof and whined past me in the dark.

I crouched to the cement pavement, involuntarily putting myself between the firing and the girl in my arms. A second report sounded, like an echo of the first, followed by a screaming cry which ended in a choking groan, then the sound of running feet.

"That's one who'll never slit another throat," the stranger remarked casually.

I waited for a moment, then, as there seemed no further danger to my unconscious charge, rose and joined the others. "What happened?" I asked.

"Oh, as we were escaping from the fire up there this poor fellow came to help us, and this other one shot him," the unknown man replied coolly. "Rankest piece of cold-blooded murder I ever saw. Positively revoltin'. Eh, Frenchy?"

"But certainly," de Grandin agreed. "He shot the noble fellow down *à froid*. Oh, yes; I saw it with my own two eyes."

"I, too," Renouard supplemented.

"Are you crazy?" I demanded. "I saw one of you grapple with this man, then when the other shot at you, you returned his fire, and——"

A kick which nearly broke my tibia was delivered to my shin. *"Ah bah,* how could you see, my friend?" de Grandin asked me almost angrily. "You were back there with Mademoiselle Alice, and the night is dark. I tell you this so estimable, noble fellow would have aided us, had not this vile miscreant assassinated him. He would have killed us, too—all three of us—had not *Monsieur*—er—this gentleman, gallantly gone forth and pulled him down with his bare hands at peril of his life. Yes, of course. That is how it was. See, here is the weapon with which the wicked murder was committed."

"Right-o, and ain't it unfortunate that it's a German gun?" the stranger added. "They'll never be able to trace it by its serial number, now. However, we're all eye-witnesses to the crime, and any ballistics expert will be able to match the bullet and the gun. So——"

"But you fired that shot!" I accused.

"I?" his tone was pregnant with injured innocence. "Why, I didn't have a weapon——"

"Mais certainement," de Grandin chimed in eagerly, "the sergeant took his weapon from him when they had their

so unfortunate misunderstanding in the street." In a fierce whisper he added:

"Learn to hold your tongue in matters not concerning you, my friend. *Regardez!*" He turned his flashlight full upon the prisoner's face.

It was the red priest.

The bellowing halloo of a fire engine's siren sounded from the other street, followed by the furious clanging of a gong. "Come," de Grandin ordered, "the fire brigade has come to fight the flames, and we must find Costello. I hope the noble fellow came to no harm as he tried to rescue us."

"Glory be, Doctor de Grandin, sor!" Costello cried as we rounded the corner and returned to the street from which we had entered the devil-worshippers' temple an hour or so earlier. "We waited for ye till we figgered ye'd been unable to signal, then went in to git ye; but th' murtherin' divils had barred th' door an' set th' place afire—be gob, I thought ye'd 'a' been cremated before this!"

"Not I," de Grandin answered with a chuckle. "It is far from so, I do assure you. But see, we have not come back empty-handed. Here, safe in good friend Trowbridge's arms, is she whom we did seek, and here"—he pointed to the red priest, who struggled futilely in the big stranger's grasp—"here is one I wish you to lock up immediately. The charge is murder. Renouard and I, as well as this gentleman, will testify against him."

"Howly Moses! Who the divil let *you* out?" the sergeant demanded, as he caught sight of our strange ally. "I thought they put the bracelets on ye, an'——"

"They did," the other interrupted with a grin, "but I didn't think such jewelry was becoming to my special brand of homeliness, so I slipped 'em off and went to take a walk——"

"Oh, ye did, eh? Well, young felly, me lad, ye can be afther walkin' right, straight back, or——"

"But no!" de Grandin cut in quickly. "I shall be responsible for him, my sergeant. He is a noble fellow. It was he who guided us from the burning building, and at the great peril of his life seized this wicked one and wrenched his pistol from him when he would have killed us. Oh, yes; I can most confidently vouch for him.

"Come to Doctor Trowbridge's when you have put that so wicked man all safely in the jail," he added as we made off toward my car. "We shall have much to tell you."

"BUT it was the only way, *mon vieux,*" de Grandin patiently explained as we drove homeward. "Their strategy was perfect—or almost so. But for good luck and this so admirable young man, we should have lost them altogether. Consider: When they set fire to that old building it burned like tinder; even now the fire brigade fights in vain to save it. With it will be utterly destroyed all evidences of their vile crimes, the paraphernalia of their secret worship—even the bones of their little victims.

"When their leader fell into our hands we had no single shred of evidence to hold him; he had simply to deny all we said, and the authorities must let him go, for where was proof of what he did? Nowhere, *parbleu*—it was burned up! Of course. But circumstances so fell out that we killed one of his companions. *Voilà,* our chance had come! We had been wooden-heads not to have grasped it. So we conspire to forswear his life. As the good Costello would express it, we have put the frame around him. It is illegal, I admit, yet it is justice. You yourself know he did slay a little baby boy, yet you know we can not prove he did it; for none of us beheld the little corpse,

and it is now but a pile of ashes mixed with other ashes. How many more like it there may be we do not surely know, but from what poor Mademoiselle Abigail told us, we know of one, at least.

"And must they die all unavenged? Must we stand by and see that spawn of hell, that devil's priest, go free because, as the lawyers say, the *corpus delicti* of his crimes can not be established for want of the small corpses? *Non, cordieu,* I say it shall not be! While he may not suffer legally for the murders which he did, the law has seized him—and *pardieu,* the law will punish him for a crime he did not do. It may not be the law, my friend; but it is justice. Surely, you agree?"

"I suppose so," I replied, "but somehow it doesn't seem——"

"Of course it does," he broke in smilingly, as though a simple matter had been settled. "Our next great task is to revive Mademoiselle Alice, make her as comfortable as may be, then notify her grieving fiancé that she is found. *Parbleu,* it will be like a tonic to see that young man's face when we inform him we have found her!"

17. *"Hiji"*

ALICE was regaining consciousness as de Grandin and I carried her upstairs and laid her on the guest-room bed. More accurately, she was no longer in a state of actual swoon, for her eyes were open, but her whole being seemed submerged in a state of lethargy so profound that she was scarcely able to move her eyes and gaze incuriously about the room.

"Mademoiselle," de Grandin whispered soothingly, "you are with friends. Nothing can harm you now. No one may order you to do that which you do not wish to do. You are safe."

"Safe," the girl repeated. It was not a query, not an assertion; merely a repetition, parrotwise, of de Grandin's final word.

She gazed at us with fixed, unquestioning eyes, like a newborn infant, or an imbecile. Her face was blank as an unwritten sheet.

The little Frenchman gave her a quick, sharp glance, half surprized, half speculative. "But certainly," he answered. "You know us, do you not? We are your friends, Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin."

"Doctor Trowbridge, Doctor de Grandin." Again that odd, phonographic repetition, incurious, disinterested, mechanical, meaningless.

She lay before us on the bed, still as she had lain upon the devil's altar, only the gentle motion of her breast and the half-light in her eyes telling us she was alive at all.

The Frenchman put his hand out and brushed the hair back from her cheeks, exposing her ears. Both lobes had been bored to receive the golden loops of the earrings she had worn, and the holes pierced through the flesh were large enough to accommodate moderately thick knitting-needles; yet the surrounding tissue was not inflamed, nor, save for a slight redness, was there any sign of granulation round the wounds. "Electrocautery," he told me softly. "They are modern in their methods, those ones, at any rate. Observe here, also, if you please——"

Following his tracing forefinger with my eyes, I saw a row of small, deep-pitted punctures in the white skin of her forearms. "Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "Morphine? Why, there are dozens of incisions! They must have given her enough to——"

He raised his hand for silence, gazing

intently at the girl's expressionless, immobile face.

"Mademoiselle," he ordered sharply, "on the table yonder you will find matches. Rise, go to them, take one and light it; then hold your finger in the flame while you count three. When that is done, you may come back to bed. *Allez!"*

She turned her oddly lifeless gaze on him as he pronounced his orders. Somehow, it seemed to me, reflected in her eyes his commands were like writing appearing supernaturally, a spirit-message on a medium's blank slate. Recorded, somehow, in her intelligence—or, rather, perceptivity—they in nowise altered the paper-blankness of her face.

Docilely, mechanically and unquestioningly, like one who walks in sleep, she rose from the bed, paced slowly across the room, took up the tray of matches and struck one.

"Hold!" de Grandin cried abruptly as she thrust her finger in the flame, but the order came a thought too late.

"One," she counted deliberately as the cruel fire licked her ivory hand, then, obedient to his latest order, removed her finger, already beginning to glow angry-red with exposure to the flame, blew out the match, turned slowly, and retraced her steps. Not by a word or inarticulate expression, not even by involuntary wincing, did she betray rebellion at his orders or consciousness of the sharp pain she must have felt.

"No, my friend," he turned to me, as though answering an unspoken question, "it was not morphine—then. But it must be so now. Quick, prepare and give a hypodermic of three-quarters of a grain as soon as is convenient. In that way she will sleep, and not be able to respond to orders such as mine—or worse."

WONDERINGLY I mixed the opiate and administered it, and de Grandin prepared a soothing unguent to bandage her burned finger. "It was heroic treatment," he apologized as he wound the surgical gauze deftly round her hand, "but something drastic was required to substantiate my theory. Otherwise I could not have rested."

"How do you mean?" I asked curiously.

"Tell me, my friend," he answered irrelevantly, fixing me with his level, unwinking stare, "have not you a feeling —have not you felt that Mademoiselle Alice, whatever might have been her provocation, was at least in some way partly guilty with those murderers who killed the little, helpless babes in Satan's worship? Have not you——"

"Yes!" I interrupted. "I *did* feel so, although I hesitated to express it. You see, I've known her all her life, and was very fond of her, but—well, it seemed to me that though she were in fear of death, or even torture, the calm way in which she accepted everything, even the murder of that helpless child—confound it, that got under my skin! When we think how poor Abigail Kimble sacrificed her life rather than endure the sight of such a heartless crime, I can't help but compare the way Alice has taken everything, and——"

"Précisément," he broke in with a laugh. "I, too, felt so, and so I did experiment to prove that we were wrong. Mademoiselle Abigail—the good God rest her soul!—was herself, in full possession of her faculties, while Mademoiselle Alice was the victim of *scopolamin apomophia."*

"Scopolamin apomophia?" I repeated blankly.

"Mais certainement; I am sure of it."

"Isn't that the so-called 'truth serum'?"

"Précisément."

"But I thought that had been discredited as a medical imposture——"

"For the purpose for which it was originally advertised; yes," he agreed. "Originally it was claimed that it could lead a criminal to confess his crimes when questioned by the officers, and in that it failed, but only because of its mechanical limitations.

"Scopolamin apomophia has a tendency so to throw the nervous system out of gear that it greatly lessens what we call the inhibitions, tearing down the warning signs which nature puts along the road of action. Subjected to its action, the criminal's caution, that cunning which warns him to refrain from talking lest he betray himself, is greatly lessened, for his volition is practically nullified. But that is not enough. No. Under *scopolamin apomophia,* if the injection be strong enough, he will repeat what is said to him, but that is not 'confession' as the law demands it. It is but parroting the accusation of the officers. So it has been discredited for judicial use.

"But for the purpose which those evil ones desired it was perfect. With a large dose of *scopolamin apomophia* injected in her veins, Mademoiselle Alice became their unresisting tool. She had no will nor wish nor consciousness except as they desired. Her mind was but a waxen record on which they wrote directions, and as the record reproduces words when placed upon the phonograph, so she reacted blindly to their orders.

"Par exemple: They dose her with the serum of *scopolamin apomophia.* They say to her, 'You will array yourself in such a way, and when the word is given you will stand thus before the altar, you will abase yourself in this wise, you will cross yourself so. Then you will permit the women to disrobe you until you stand all nude before the people; but you will not feel embarrassed. No. You will thereon mount the altar and lay yourself upon it as it were a bed and stay there till we bid you rise.'

"And as they have commanded, so she does. Did you not note the similarity of her walk and general bearing when she crossed the room a moment hence and when she stood before the altar of the devil?"

"Yes," I agreed, "I did."

"Très bon. I thought as much. Therefore, when I saw those marks upon her arms and recognized them as the trail of hypodermic needles, I said to me: 'Jules de Grandin, it are highly probable that *scopolamin apomophia* has been used on her.' And I replied, 'It are wholly likely, Jules de Grandin.'

"Very well, then. Let us experiment. It has been some time since she was dosed with this medicine which steals her volition, yet her look and bearing and the senseless manner she repeats our words back at us reminds me greatly of one whom I had seen in Paris when the gendarmes had administered *scopolamin apomophia* to him.

"Bien alors, I did bid her rise and hurt herself. Only a person whose instinct of self-preservation has been blocked would go and put his hand in living flame merely because another told him to, *n'est-ce-pas?*

"Yet she did do it, and without protest. As calmly as though I requested that she eat a bonbon, she rose and crossed the room and thrust her so sweet finger into searing flame. *La pauvre!* I did hate myself to see her do it, yet I knew that unless she did I must inevitably hate her. The case is proved, good Friend Trowbridge. We have no need to feel resentful toward her. The one

we saw bow down before the devil's altar, the one we saw take part in their vile rites, was not our Mademoiselle Alice. No, by no means. It was but her poor image, the flesh which she is clothed in. The real girl whom we sought, and whom we brought away with us, was absent, for her personality, her consciousness and volition were stolen by those evil men exactly as they stole the little boys they slew upon the altar of the devil."

I nodded, much relieved. His argument was convincing, and I was eager to be convinced.

"Now we have sunk her in a sleep of morphine, she will rest easily," he finished. "Later we shall see how she progresses, and if conditions warrant it, tomorrow young John Davisson shall once more hold his *amoureuse* against his heart. Yes. That will be a happy day for me.

"Shall we rejoin the others? We have much to talk about; and that Renouard, how well I know him! the bottle will be empty if we do not hasten!"

"So I hanged the blighters out of hand," the stranger was telling Renouard as de Grandin and I rejoined them in the study.

"Admirable. Superb. I approve," Renouard returned, then rose and bowed with jack-knife formality to the stranger, de Grandin and me in turn. "Jules, Doctor Trowbridge," he announced, "permit that I make you acquaint' with Monsieur le Baron Ingraham, late of His Majesty's *gendarmerie* in Sierra Leone—Monsieur le Baron, Doctor Jules de Grandin, Doctor Trowbridge. I am Inspector Renouard of the *Service Sûreté*."

Smilingly the stranger acknowledged the introductions, adding: "It ain't quite as bad as the Inspector makes it out, gentlemen. My pater happened to leave me a baronetcy—with no money to support the title—but you'd hardly call me a baron, I fear. As to the *gendarmerie*, I was captain in the Sierra Leone Frontier Police, but——"

"Exactly, precisely, quite so," Renouard interjected. "It is as I said. Monsieur le Baron's experiences strangely parallel my own. Tell them, if you please, Monsieur le Bar——"

"Give over!" cried the other sharply. "I can't have you Monsieur le Baroning me all over the place, you know—it gives me the hump! My sponsors in baptism named me Haddingway Ingraham Jameson Ingraham—H-I-J-I, you know—and I'm known in the service as 'Hiji'. Why not compromise on that—we're all policemen here, I take it?"

"All but Doctor Trowbridge, who has both the courage and the wit to qualify," de Grandin answered. "Now, Monsieur Hiji, you were about to tell Inspector Renouard——" He paused with upraised eyebrows.

The big Englishman produced a small black pipe and a tin of Three Nuns, slowly tamped tobacco in the briar and eyed us quizzically. He was even bigger than I'd thought at first, and despite his prematurely whitened hair, much younger than I'd estimated. Thirty-one or two at most, I guessed. "How strong is your credulity?" he asked at length.

"Parbleu, it is marvelous, magnificent," declared de Grandin. "We can believe that which we know is false, if you can prove it to us!"

"It'll take a lot of believing," Ingraham answered, "but it's all true, just the same.

"A year or so ago, about the time Inspector Renouard was beginning to investigate the missing girls, queer rumors began trickling back to Freetown from the Reserved Forest Areas. We've always

had leopard societies in the back country —gangs of cannibals who disguise themselves as leopards and go out stalking victims for their ritual feasts—of course, but this seemed something rather new. Some one was stirring up the natives to a *poro*—an oath-bound resistance to government. The victims of the latest leopard outrages were men who failed to subscribe to the rebellion. Several village headmen and sub-chiefs had been popped into the pot by the leopard men, and the whole area was getting in an awful state of funk.

"Nobody wants to go up in the Reserved Forests, so they sent me. 'Let good old Hiji do it; Hiji's the lad for this show!' they said; so I took a dozen Houssa policemen, two Lewis guns and ten pounds or so of quinine and set out.

"Ten days back in the brush we ran across the leopards' spoor. We'd stopped at a Mendi village and I sent word forward for the headman to come out. He didn't come.

"That wasn't so good. If I waited too long for him outside the place I'd lose face; if I went in to him after summoning him to come to me, he would have 'put shame on me.' Finally I compromised by going in alone.

"The chief lolled before his hut with his warriors and women around him, and it didn't take more than half an eye to see he'd placed no seat for me.

" 'I see you, Chief,' I told him, swaggering forward with the best assurance I could summon. I also saw that he was wearing a string of brummagem beads about his neck, as were most of his warriors, and wondered at it, for no license had been issued to a trader recently, and we'd had no reports of white men in the section for several years.

" 'I see you, white man,' he replied, but made no move to rise or offer me a seat.

" 'Why do you thus put shame upon the King-Emperor's representative?' I demanded.

" 'We want no dealings with the Emperor-King, or any of his men,' the fellow answered. 'The land is ours, the English have no right here; we will have no more of him.' The patter rattled off his tongue as glibly as though he had been a soap-box orator preaching communism in Hyde Park.

"This was rank sedition, not at all the sort of thing to be countenanced, you know, so I went right for the blighter. 'Get up from there, you unholy rotter,' I ordered, 'and tell your people you have spoken with a crooked tongue, or——'

"It was a lucky thing for me I'm handy with my feet. A spear came driving at me, missing me by less than half an inch, and another followed it, whistling past my head so close I felt the wind of it.

"Fortunately, my men were hiding just outside, and Bendigo, my half-caste Arab sergeant, was a willing worker with the Enfield. He shot the foremost spearman through the head before the fellow had a chance to throw a second weapon, and the other men began to shoot before you could say 'knife'. It was a gory business, and we'd rather killed half the poor beggars before they finally called it quits.

"The chief was most apologetic when the fracas ended, of course, and swore he had been misled by white men who spoke with crooked tongues.

"This was interesting. It seemed, from what the beggar told me, there had been several white men wandering at large through the area distributing what would be equivalent to radical literature at home—preaching armed and violent rebellion to government and all that sort

of thing. Furthermore, they'd told the natives the brummagem beads they gave 'em would act as 'medicine' against the white man's bullets, and that no one need fear to raid a mission station or refuse to pay the hut-tax, for England had been overthrown and only a handful of Colonial administrators remained—no army to come to their rescue if the natives were to rise and wipe 'em out.

"This was bad enough, but worse was coming. It appeared these playful little trouble-makers were preaching miscegenation. This was something new. The natives had never regarded themselves as inferior beings, for it's strictly against regulations to say or do anything tending to do more than make 'em respect the whites as agents of the government, but they'd never—save in the rarest instances—attempted to take white women. Oh, yes, they killed 'em sometimes, often with torture, but that was simply part of the game—no chivalry about the black boy, you know. But these white agitators were deliberately urging the Timni, Mendis and Sulima to raid settlements and mission stations and spare the women that they might be carried off as prizes.

"That was plenty. Right there the power of the British rule had to be shown, so I rounded up all the villagers who hadn't taken to the woods, told 'em they'd been misled by lying white men whom I'd hang as soon as caught, then strung the chief up to the nearest oil-palm. His neck muscles were inordinately strong and he died in circumstances of considerable elaboration and discomfort, but the object-lesson was worth while. There'd be no more defiance of a government agent by *that* gang.

"We were balked at every turn. Most of our native informers had been killed and eaten, and the other blacks were sullen. Not a word could we get from 'em regarding leopard depredations, and they shut up like a lot of clams when we asked about the white trouble-makers.

"We'd never have gotten anywhere if it hadn't been for Old Man Anderson. He was a Wesleyan missionary who ran a little chapel and clinic 'way up by the French border. His wife and daughter helped him. He might have loved his God; he certainly had a strange love for his womenfolk to bring 'em into that stinkin' hellhole.

"It was a month after our brush with the Mendi when we crashed through the jungle to Anderson's. The place was newly raided, burned and leveled to the ground, ashes still warm. What was left of the old man we found by the burned chapel—all except his head. They'd taken that away for a souvenir. We found the bodies of several of his converts, too. They'd been flayed, their skins stripped off as you'd turn off a glove. His wife and daughter were nowhere to be found.

"They hadn't taken any special pains to cover up their tracks, and we followed at a forced march. We came upon 'em three days later.

"The blighters had eaten 'emselves loggy, and drunk enough trade-gin to float the *Berengaria*, so they didn't offer much resistance when we charged. I'd always thought a man who slaughtered unresisting enemies was a rotten beast, but the memory of old Anderson's dismembered body and those pink, skinless corpses made me revise my notion. We came upon 'em unawares, opened with the Lewis guns from both sides of the village and didn't sound cease firin' till the dead lay round like logwood corded in a lumber camp. Then, and not till then, we went in.

"We found old Mrs. Anderson dead, but still warm. She'd—I think you can

imagine what she'd been through, gentlemen.

"We found the daughter, too. Not quite dead.

"In the four days since her capture she'd been abused by more than a hundred men, black and white, and was barely breathing when we came on her. She——"

"White and black, *Monsieur?*" de Grandin interrupted.

"Right-o. The raiding party had been led by whites. Five of 'em. Stripped off their clothes and put on native ornaments, carried native weapons, and led the blacks in their hellish work. Indeed, I don't believe the poor black beggars would have gone out against the 'Jesus Papa' if those white hellions hadn't set 'em up to it.

"They'd regarded Rebekah Anderson as good as dead, and made no secret of their work. The leader was a Russian, so were two of his assistants. A fourth was Polish and the last some sort of Asiatic—a Turk, the poor child thought.

"They'd come up through Liberia, penetrated the Protectorate and set the natives up to devilment, finally organizing the raid on Anderson's. Now their work was done, and they were on their way.

"She heard the leader say he was going to America, for in Harrisonville, New Jersey, the agents of his society had found a woman whom they sought and who would lead some sort of movement against organized religion. The poor kid didn't understand it all—no more did I—but she heard it, and remembered.

"The white men had left the night before, striking east into French Guinea on their way to the coast, and leaving her as a plaything for the natives.

"Before the poor child died she told me the Russian in command had been a man with a slender, almost boyish body, but with the wrinkled face of an old man. She's seen him stripped for action, you know, and was struck by the strange contrast of his face and body.

"One other thing she told me: When they got to America they intended holding meetings of their damned society, and the road to their rendezvous would be directed by pictures of the Devil with his pitchfork pointing the way the person seeking it should take. She didn't understand, of course, but—I had all the clues I wanted, and as soon as we got back to Freetown I got a leave of absence to hunt that foul murderer down and bring him to justice."

The young man paused a moment to relight his pipe, and there was something far from pleasant in his lean and sunburned face as he continued: "Rebekah Anderson went to her grave like an old Sumerian queen. I impounded every man who'd had a hand in the raid and put 'em to work diggin' a grave for her, then a big, circular trench around it. Then I hanged 'em and dumped their carcasses into the trench to act as guard of honor for the girl they'd killed. You couldn't bribe a native to go near the place, now.

"I was followin' the little pictures of the Devil when Renouard set on me. I mistook him for one of 'em, of course, and—well, it's a lucky thing for all of us Costello bashed me when he did."

De Grandin's little, round blue eyes were alight with excitement and appreciation. "And how did you escape, *Monsieur?*" he asked.

The Englishman laughed shortly. "Got a pair of handcuffs?" he demanded.

"I have," supplied Renouard.

"Lock 'em on me."

The manacles clicked round his wrists and he turned to us with a grin. "Absolutely no deception, gentlemen, nothing concealed in the hands, nothing up the sleeves," he announced in a droning sing-

song, then, as easily as though slipping them through his shirt sleeves, drew his hands through the iron bracelets. "Just a matter of small bones and limber muscles," he added with another smile. "Being double-jointed helps some, too. It was no trick at all to slip the darbies off when the constables joined Costello for the raid. I put the irons on the other person—locked 'em on his ankles—so the boys would find 'em when they came back to the motor."

"But——" Renouard began, only to pause with the next word half uttered. From upstairs came a quavering little frightened cry, like the tremulous call of a screech-owl or of a child in mortal terror.

"No noise!" de Grandin warned as he leaped from his seat and bounded up the stairway three steps at a time, Renouard and Ingraham close behind him.

WE RACED on tiptoe down the upper hall and paused a second by the bedroom door; then de Grandin kicked it open.

Alice crouched upon the bed, half raised upon one elbow, her other arm bent guardingly across her face. The red robe we had put upon her when we fled the Devil's temple had fallen back, revealing her white throat and whiter breast, her loosened hair fell across her shoulders.

Close by the open window, like a beast about to spring, crouched a man. Despite his changed apparel, his heavy coat and tall, peaked cap of astrakhan, we recognized him in a breath. Those big, sad eyes fixed on the horror-stricken girl, that old and wrinkle-bitten face, could be none other's than the red priest's. His slender, almost womanish hands were clenched to talons, every muscle of his lithe, spare frame was taut—stretched harp-string tight for the leap he poised to make. Yet there was no malignancy—hardly any interest—in his old, close-wrinkled face. Rather, it seemed to me, he looked at her with a gaze of brooding speculation.

"Parbleu, Monsieur du Diable, you honor us too much; this call was wholly unexpected!" de Grandin said, as he stepped quickly forward.

Quick as he was, the other man was quicker. One glance—one murderous glance which seemed to focus all the hate and fury of a thwarted soul—he cast upon the Frenchman, then leaped back through the window.

Crash! de Grandin's pistol-shot seemed like a clap of thunder in the room as he fired at the retreating form, and a second shot sped through the window as the intruder landed on the snow below and staggered toward the street.

"Winged him, by Jove!" the Englishman cried exultantly. "Nice shooting, Frenchy!"

"Nice be damned and roasted on the grates of hell!" de Grandin answered furiously. "Is he not free?"

They charged downstairs, leaving me to comfort Alice, and I heard their voices as they searched the yard. Ten minutes later they returned, breathing heavily from their efforts, but empty-handed.

"Slipped through us like an eel!" the Englishman exclaimed. "Must have had a motor waiting at the curb, and——"

"Sacré nom d'un nom d'un nom!" de Grandin stormed. "What are they thinking of, those stupid-heads? Is not he charged with murder? Yes, *pardieu,* yet they let him roam about at will, and—it is monstrous; it is vile; it is not to be endured!"

Snatching up the telephone he called police headquarters, then: "What means

this, Sergeant?" he demanded when Costello answered. "We sit here like four *sacré* fools and think ourselves secure, and that one—that so vile murderer—comes breaking in the house and—what? *Pas possible!*"

"It is, sor," we heard Costello's answer as de Grandin held the receiver from his ear. "That bur-rd ye handed me is in 'is cell this minute; an' furthermore, he's been there every second since we locked 'im up!"

Don't miss the thrilling chapters in next month's WEIRD TALES, *which tell how the Red Priest, after his death in the electric chair, calls the wolves to his bidding and tears Alice Hume from her friends. In the June issue, on sale May 1st.*

Mystery

By CRISTEL HASTINGS

There are shadows creeping, crawling
  Through the forest, through the wood,
And the low night winds are sobbing
  Where a grayish house once stood

With its air of age and silence,
  Windows shuttered to the sun,
With its creaking gate and stairways
  Where the furtive shadows run.

All is loneliness and silence:
  All is dark with mystery—
Winds keep searching, spent and breathless,
  Till the fainting sunbeams flee.

All they find are strange blue silence,
  Memories and weeds and sighs
That go echoing like whispers
  Somewhere to the moon-mad skies.

But the shadows keep on creeping,
  Crawling early, sprawling late—
While the wind runs on in terror
  Like a phantom through the gate.

The Broken Thread

By KIRK MASHBURN

A grim story of an unspeakable horror, a tale of crystal-gazing and an eery murder

JOHN CLAYTON was the best friend I ever had, and tomorrow I hang for his murder. I shot him; and that is all the state's attorney, or the exasperated young barrister appointed by the court to defend me when I neglected to employ my own counsel, ever got out of me at the trial.

The prosecution labeled me a cold-blooded murderer, which I am not. Shoot John Clayton I did, but not in cold blood, nor was it murder. Under like circumstances (which, thank God, can not be) I would do it again.

I saw no reason to tell in court what I am about to write down now. They would have condemned me to the hangman with almost the same certainty, although there is a slight chance that I might have escaped the gallows for the madhouse. To me, that would have been no escape; and besides, *I believe Clayton needs me where he is!*

It all goes back to a woman, and too much leisure on our part; which is that much more evidence of the danger of both. We had proved up an oil concession in Venezuela, and sold it for more money than we knew there was in the world, and we did not know what to do with ourselves thereafter. It was the first time in ten years of knocking around together that we had ever had more than enough for a grubstake, or for a little fling between spells of chasing rainbows.

Out of sheer boredom, John blundered in on a spiritualistic séance, as he said, "to have his fortune told." I never knew exactly how he happened to meet Madame Zara, as she called herself, but I do know that she fascinated him from the very start.

We've both had our palms read by some clever *Gitanos*—gipsies—in Spain, and seen Hindoo fakirs do some things that made us wonder a lot even while we scoffed; so I don't think Clayton took much more actual stock in Zara's clairvoyance than I did. He raved at length and in detail over her charms, which I had to admit were as genuine as I thought her spiritualistic pretensions spurious. Privately, I thought her more interested in a slice—a big slice—of the proceeds of our flyer in Venezuelan oil than in John. I disliked her for that, if for no other reason.

She had a medium's sensitiveness, all right, and she felt and returned my own antagonism. We both covered it up as well as we could; I, for my part, realizing that a whole lot of my feeling might be attributable to jealousy at her sharing John with me, perhaps supplanting me. I can't blame her for what happened. She had powers about which I knew nothing, and at which I sneered quite openly. God knows I have paid for that!

Clayton felt that something was wrong between Zara and me, and shrewdly guessed part of the cause. At least, I suppose that was why he insisted upon my accompanying him to innumerable of her private séances, to show me that I was still included in everything affecting him, as I had always been.

WE HEARD and saw the usual claptrap of knockings and writings, in a darkened room; or, sometimes, Zara

gazed into a lighted crystal ball and said irrelevant nothings while seemingly in a trance. I had seen it all a dozen times before I ever heard of Zara, but John would drag me to it despite my protests, becoming angry if I persisted in refusing. It got on my nerves, and my irritation, as was inevitable, finally led me to openly expressed skepticism of such mummery. Zara caught me up like a flash.

"So! Eet ees fake, yes?" My trial brought out the fact that she was of Basque origin, and her accent was noticeable in proportion to the intensity of her feeling. "Well, suppose I show you sometheeng w'eech can not be fake, eh? You weel belief our Juan, not so?"

I didn't see where she was leading, and said so.

"Suppose I put Juan een a trance—send hees *alma*—w'at you call soul—away from hees body, an' then let heem tell us w'at he see, eh?"

"Oh, rot!" I am afraid that I was deliberately rude, but I was sick of hocus-pocus, and this was a bit too much. "What difference does it make what I think, anyway? It isn't going to affect your paying clientele."

John, however, was eager for the experiment. It offered a possible chance to vindicate Zara in my eyes, and he insisted upon the attempt. It was only then that I realized what a grip she had on him.

Zara seemed considerably more hesitant, now that she had cooled from the flash of temper that had caused her to make the proposition. She knew better than we did, what she was trifling with. She half shook her head, something of uneasiness in her eyes, and it was at that precise moment that the Devil himself must have inspired me to smile, a little crookedly. Zara saw it, and stiffened instantly. It was enough. Even if she fully realized what she was about to do, her hot Basque temperament could not count costs in the face of ridicule. Whatever John might have been to her, he was not enough.

"Seet here!" she commanded him, motioning to the black velvet-covered table upon which rested the indispensable crystal. John sat as she bade. *"You"*—she fairly spat the word—"seet there, and *keep quiet!"*

I TOOK the chair she indicated, about ten feet away from the table, opposite where John sat. Zara felt under the table, and all the lights in the sable-draped room switched off, leaving it in absolute darkness. Then a light flashed on, deep in the heart of the crystal, lighting it so that it seemed to retain all its refulgence within itself, though it disclosed John's tense, expectant face above it.

"Now," Zara's voice came through the darkness, "look into the creestal, my Juan, an' weel yourself to sleep. I weel help you."

John's face bent closer over the globe, his eyes focusing intently upon its shimmering depths. Zara began to speak in a low, monotonous voice. What language she spoke in, I do not know; nor, after the first few minutes, did it matter. The steady, unvarying monotone went on until it lost the seeming of voice and words and became but a lethean droning, with its burden the command: Sleep—*sleep!*

Even without the hypnotic influence of the lighted crystal into which Clayton gazed, I was powerfully affected by the changeless somnific quality of Zara's tones. Dimly I saw that John's head was sinking lower, his stare into the crystal becoming more fixed. Suddenly I was aware of a ghostly white hand thrusting out of the darkness, reaching stealthily toward him. My drowsiness vanished in a creeping sensation that prickled the hairs upon the back of my neck; and

then I saw the hand cup softly under John's chin, and realized that Zara had quit her droning, and was gently forcing her subject backward to a more reclining position in his chair.

Although he was thereby moved away from the crystal, Clayton's face remained the only visible object in the room; the result, I suppose, of ingenious focusing of the lights in the globe.

Zara withdrew her hand, and her voice once more broke the silence.

"You are asleep." It was statement, rather than question.

"I am asleep," John's flat voice confirmed.

"Yet you are awake—onlee your body ees asleep, and the mind w'eech see through your earth-eyes." Zara paused, and when she resumed speaking, her words came slowly, as if she dreaded to utter them.

"You are abo't to leef your body, remaining connect' weeth eet onlee by a leetle thread w'eech ees my weel; you are leefeeng, ees not?"

For a perceptible space there was no answer; the lips framed in John's set, blank face remained motionless and silent. Then, heavily, as with an effort: "Yes, I—am—leaving——"

"Slow!" Zara's voice was tense. "Slow! An' keep connect' weeth me."

Again there was silence. Finally, after what seemed so long a time I was becoming restless, Zara spoke again.

"Are you free?"

"Yes." John's voice was fainter, but the answer came readily and distinctly enough.

"Tell me w'at you do, w'at you see?"

"I am——" The voice expressed puzzlement, paused. "I am still in the room with you, yet not with you. I see the city, but I am not in the city: I am in a void, a great blackness—a *blankness* . . . yet I see. . . ."

"W'at do you see?"

"Nothing. . . . Yes! Shapes—swirling shapes, all around me, everywhere."

"Ah! W'at are they like, Juan?"

The answer came hesitantly. "I don't know. . . . Some of them are like me; some are plainer than others. They have me surrounded, hemmed in."

"Are they—friendlee?" Zara was anxious.

"Most of them act curious: they just stare. I can see their eyes. . . . Some of them are sort of horrible-looking. . . . I don't like them. One is coming closer—good God! What a fearsome thing it is! I think it's inimical; I don't like it! I want to come back. It——"

Clayton's voice trailed off in a gasp. I was considerably impatient by this time. I held that Zara wasn't proving anything, as I had questioned her spiritualism, not her ability as a hypnotist. I took it for granted that John, in his present state, would say anything she willed him to say. Still, I had to admit there was an eery sense of realism to it that impressed me in spite of myself, which probably irritated me more than anything else.

"Cut it out, Zara! I've had enough of——"

"Quiet!" she cried. "In God's name, be quiet!"

Before I could say more, there was a cry from Clayton's lips that froze in my mouth whatever words I could have uttered.

"Zara!" It was pure anguish, if ever I heard it. "Zara! *It's breaking the thread!*"

Zara screamed: *"Ayudame, Dios! Maria Santissima!"* Then, with a mighty effort that wrung instinctive tribute from me even then, she forced her voice to a command, steady, but vibrant in its intensity. "You must not let eet break, Juan! Come back: I am help you! *Come back!*"

I HEARD a click, and the room was flooded with light at Zara's touch upon the switch. The sudden change from utter blackness blinded me for a moment. When my eyes adjusted themselves, I saw that Clayton's face was drained of color, and there was something shocking about the way it remained blank and staring and yet, at the same time, seemed to express a desperation that was reflected in Zara's own countenance.

She was speaking with a vital burden to her words that impresses me even now; but what she said, what words she used, I do not know. I sat staring, rigid in my chair.

There was a groan from out those colorless lips; and I thought I saw a swift spasm cross the pallid brow. What follows is something that, although I know that I am sane, as well and surely as I know that tomorrow I hang, I hesitate to set down.

First, there was a laugh from Clayton's lips—*but it was not Clayton who laughed!* The sound was more nearly a low, brief chuckle, obscene, utterly evil, and—*triumphant!* Without seeing her, I felt Zara sag, as if beneath a blow she could not withstand. Then——

(Am I mad? Or did I see this thing? Yes, I saw; tomorrow they hang me for the seeing!)

——then, before my torturing eyes, John Clayton's face changed: changed form, line and color. I *saw* it bloat and swell, and turn a mottled greenish hue; I saw the neck shorten and thicken, the hair give way to bony, sloping plates. The eyes opened, slyly, and I looked into the Pit. Zara sobbed, and It moved, swelled.

With an effort into which she threw all her heart and soul and will, Zara made her last attempt to recall Clayton, to send the Thing back to the place whence it came. Once more, I felt her without seeing, as she stiffened, hurled all the force and power in her to renewed attack.

It was not enough; but it sufficed in so much that the seeming of the monster faded, and John's poor face looked through for an instant. Once more, one last time, his voice broke feebly through what had been his lips. One word.

And the word was "Kill!"

Then what had been John Clayton was nearly all a Thing.

I carried a gun beneath my armpit, a habit formed in far places where it is advisable, if one would live long. Before I could use it, Zara had sprung at—It—with her bare hands. The Thing heaved up. In less time than it takes to write it, before I could even move, It had crushed her close, bent her backward. She screamed once, and then I sickened as I heard her spine snap.

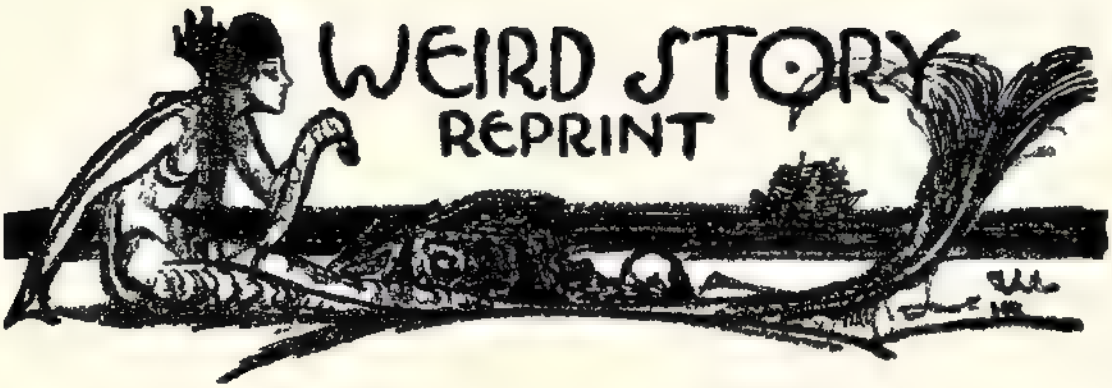
At that, I shot It.

I stood over where It had fallen on the floor, and watched what had been John Clayton and then a Thing, become John Clayton once again. Only, this time there was a bullet-hole in his forehead.

They say I put the bullet in Clayton's head, but that is truth which is yet a lie: I shot a Thing and not a friend. And they point to my great size and nod their heads, and say how easy it was for one of my strength to break so small a body as Zara's. But that is wholly a lie, for the Thing did it. I changed my estimate of Zara during those minutes I watched her battle with all her being to undo a folly that I, unwitting, drove her to. I would not have harmed her, at any rate.

Twice she has come to me in the night, through the steel walls of this condemned cell. Both times she has told me that she and Clayton need me—that the menace of the baffled Thing exists for them as yet.

Tomorrow—today, it may be, now—I go to help them.



Frankenstein

By MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT-SHELLEY

LETTER 1

To Mrs. Saville, England

ST. PETERSBURGH, *Dec.* 11*th*, 17—.

YOU will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings. I arrived here yesterday; and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare, and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking.

I am already far north of London; and as I walk in the streets of Petersburgh, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves, and fills me with delight. Do you understand this feeling? This breeze, which has travelled from the regions towards which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes. Inspirited by this wind of promise, my day dreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There, Margaret, the sun is for ever visible; its broad disk just skirting the horizon, and diffusing a perpetual splendor. There, snow and frost are banished; and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle; and may regulate a thousand celestial observations, that require only this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent for ever. I shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by the foot of man.

These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death, and to induce me to commence this laborious voyage with the joy a child feels when he embarks in a little boat, with his holiday mates, on an expedition of discovery up his native river. But, supposing all these conjectures to be false, you can not contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all mankind to the last generation, by discovering a passage

near the pole to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine.

Six years have passed since I resolved on my present undertaking. I can, even now, remember the hour from which I dedicated myself to this great enterprise. I commenced by inuring my body to hardship. I accompanied the whale-fishers on several expeditions to the North Sea; I voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep; I often worked harder than the common sailors during the day, and devoted my nights to the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those branches of physical science from which a naval adventurer might derive the greatest practical advantage. Twice I actually hired myself as an under-mate in a Greenland whaler, and acquitted myself to admiration. I must own I felt a little proud when my captain offered me the second dignity in the vessel, and entreated me to remain with the greatest earnestness; so valuable did he consider my services.

And now, dear Margaret, do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose? My life might have been passed in ease and luxury; but I preferred glory to every enticement that wealth placed in my path. Oh, that some encouraging voice would answer in the affirmative! My courage and my resolution is firm; but my hopes fluctuate and my spirits are often depressed. I am about to proceed on a long and difficult voyage, the emergencies of which will demand all my fortitude: I am required not only to raise the spirits of others, but sometimes to sustain my own, when theirs are failing.

This is the most favorable period for travelling in Russia. They fly quickly over the snow in their sledges; the motion is pleasant, and, in my opinion, far more agreeable than that of an English stage-coach. The cold is not excessive, if you are wrapped in furs—a dress which I have already adopted; for there is a great difference between walking the deck and remaining seated motionless for hours, when no exercise prevents the blood from actually freezing in your veins. I have no ambition to lose my life on the post-road between St. Petersburgh and Archangel.

I shall depart for the latter town in a fortnight or three weeks; and my intention is to hire a ship there, which can easily be done by paying the insurance for the owner, and to engage as many sailors as I think necessary among those who are accustomed to the whale-fishing. I do not intend to sail until the month of June; and when shall I return? Ah, dear sister, how can I answer this question? If I succeed, many, many months, perhaps years, will pass before you and I may meet. If I fail, you will see me again soon, or never.

Farewell, my dear, excellent Margaret. Heaven shower down blessings on you, and save me, that I may again and again testify my gratitude for all your love and kindness.—Your affectionate brother,

R. WALTON.

LETTER 2

To Mrs. Saville, England

ARCHANGEL, *March 28th*, 17—.

HOW slowly the time passes here, encompassed as I am by frost and snow! yet a second step is taken towards my enterprise. I have hired a vessel, and am occupied in collecting my sailors; those whom I have already engaged appear to be men on whom I can depend, and are certainly possessed of dauntless courage.

But I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy; and the absence of the object of which I now feel as a most

severe evil. I have no friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there will be none to participate my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no one will endeavor to sustain me in dejection. I shall commit my thoughts to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathize with me; whose eyes would reply to mine.

You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a friend repair the faults of your poor brother! I am too ardent in execution, and too impatient of difficulties. But it is a still greater evil to me that I am self-educated: for the first fourteen years of my life I ran wild on a common, and read nothing but our uncle Thomas's books of voyages. At that age I became acquainted with the celebrated poets of our own country; but it was only when it had ceased to be in my power to derive its most important benefits from such conviction that I perceived the necessity of becoming acquainted with more languages than that of my native country. Now I am twenty-eight, and am in reality more illiterate than many schoolboys of fifteen. It is true that I have thought more, and that my day dreams are more extended and magnificent; but they want (as the painters call it) *keeping;* and I greatly need a friend who would have sense enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to endeavor to regulate my mind.

Well, these are useless complaints; I shall certainly find no friend on the wide ocean, nor even here in Archangel, among merchants and seamen.

Yet do not suppose, because I complain a little, or because I can conceive a consolation for my toils which I may never know, that I am wavering in my resolutions. Those are as fixed as fate; and my voyage is only now delayed until the weather shall permit my embarkation. The winter has been dreadfully severe; but the spring promises well, and it is considered as a remarkably early season; so that perhaps I may sail sooner than I expected.

I can not describe to you my sensations on the near prospect of my undertaking. It is impossible to communicate to you a conception of the trembling sensation, half pleasurable and half fearful, with which I am preparing to depart. I am going to unexplored regions, to "the land of mist and snow," but I shall kill no albatross; therefore do not be alarmed for my safety, or if I should come back to you as worn and woful as the "Ancient Mariner." You will smile at my allusion; but I will disclose a secret. I have often attributed my attachment to, my passionate enthusiasm for, the dangerous mysteries of ocean, to that production of the most imaginative of modern poets. There is something at work in my soul which I do not understand. I am practically industrious—painstaking;—a workman to execute with perseverance and labor:—but besides this, there is a love for the marvellous, a belief in the marvellous, intertwined in all my projects, which hurries me out of the common pathways of men, even to the wild sea and unvisited regions I am about to explore.

But to return to dearer considerations. Shall I meet you again, after having traversed immense seas, and returned by the most southern cape of Africa or America? I dare not expect such success, yet I can not bear to look on the reverse of the picture. Continue for the present to write to me by every opportunity: I may receive

your letters on some occasions when I need them most to support my spirits. I love you very tenderly. Remember me with affection, should you never hear from me again.—Your affectionate brother,

ROBERT WALTON.

LETTER 3

To Mrs. Saville, England

July 7th, 17—.

MY DEAR SISTER,—I write a few lines in haste, to say that I am safe, and well advanced on my voyage. This letter will reach England by a merchantman now on its homeward voyage from Archangel; more fortunate than I, who may not see my native land, perhaps, for many years. I am, however, in good spirits: my men are bold, and apparently firm of purpose; nor do the floating sheets of ice that continually pass us, indicating the dangers of the region towards which we are advancing, appear to dismay them. We have already reached a very high latitude; but it is the height of summer, and although not so warm as in England, the southern gales, which blow us speedily towards those shores which I so ardently desire to attain, breathe a degree of renovating warmth which I had not expected.

No incidents have hitherto befallen us that would make a figure in a letter. One or two stiff gales, and the springing of a leak, are accidents which experienced navigators scarcely remember to record; and I shall be well content if nothing worse happens to us during our voyage.

Adieu, my dear Margaret. Be assured that for my own sake, as well as yours, I will not rashly encounter danger. I will be cool, persevering, and prudent.

But success *shall* crown my endeavors. Wherefore not? Thus far I have gone, tracing a secure way over the pathless seas: the very stars themselves being witnesses and testimonies of my triumph. Why not still proceed over the untamed yet obedient element? What can stop the determined heart and resolved will of man?

My swelling heart involuntarily pours itself out thus. But I must finish. Heaven bless my beloved sister!

R. W.

LETTER 4

To Mrs. Saville, England

August 5th, 17—.

SO STRANGE an accident has happened to us that I can not forbear recording it, although it is very probable that you will see me before these papers can come into your possession.

Last Monday (July 31st), we were nearly surrounded by ice, which closed in the ship on all sides, scarcely leaving her the sea-room in which she floated. Our situation was somewhat dangerous, especially as we were compassed round by a very thick fog. We accordingly lay to, hoping that some change would take place in the atmosphere and weather.

About two o'clock the mist cleared away, and we beheld, stretched out in every direction, vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to have no end. Some of my comrades groaned, and my own mind began to grow watchful with anxious thoughts, when a strange sight suddenly attracted our attention, and diverted our solicitude from our own situation. We perceived a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by dogs, pass on towards the north, at the distance of half a mile: a being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature, sat in the sledge, and guided the dogs. We watched the rapid progress of the traveller with our telescopes, until he was lost among the distant inequalities of the ice.

This appearance excited our unqualified wonder. We were, as we believed, many

hundred miles from any land; but this apparition seemed to denote that it was not, in reality, so distant as we had supposed. Shut in, however, by ice, it was impossible to follow his track, which we had observed with the greatest attention.

About two hours after this occurrence, we heard the ground sea; and before night the ice broke, and freed our ship. We, however, lay to until the morning, fearing to encounter in the dark those large loose masses which float about after the breaking up of the ice. I profited of this time to rest for a few hours.

In the morning, however, as soon as it was light, I went upon deck, and found all the sailors busy on one side of the vessel, apparently talking to some one in the sea. It was, in fact, a sledge, like that we had seen before, which had drifted towards us in the night, on a large fragment of ice. Only one dog remained alive; but there was a human being within it, whom the sailors were persuading to enter the vessel. He was not, as the other traveller seemed to be, a savage inhabitant of some undiscovered island, but an European. When I appeared on deck, the master said, "Here is our captain, and he will not allow you to perish on the open sea."

On perceiving me, the stranger addressed me in English, although with a foreign accent. "Before I come on board your vessel," said he, "will you have the kindness to inform me whither you are bound?"

You may conceive my astonishment on hearing such a question addressed to me from a man on the brink of destruction, and to whom I should have supposed that my vessel would have been a resource which he would not have exchanged for the most precious wealth the earth can afford. I replied, however, that we were on a voyage of discovery towards the northern pole.

Upon hearing this he appeared satisfied, and consented to come on board. Good God! Margaret, if you had seen the man who thus capitulated for his safety, your surprize would have been boundless. His limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering. I never saw a man in so wretched a condition. We attempted to carry him into the cabin; but as soon as he quitted the fresh air, he fainted. We accordingly brought him back to the deck, and restored him to animation by rubbing him with brandy, and forcing him to swallow a small quantity. As soon as he showed signs of life we wrapped him up in blankets, and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen stove. By slow degrees he recovered, and ate a little soup, which restored him wonderfully.

Two days passed in this manner before he was able to speak; and I often feared that his sufferings had deprived him of understanding. When he had in some measure recovered, I removed him to my own cabin, and attended on him as much as my duty would permit. I never saw a more interesting creature: his eyes have generally an expression of wildness, and even madness; but there are moments when, if any one performs an act of kindness towards him, or does him any the most trifling service, his whole countenance is lighted up, as it were, with a beam of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equalled. But he is generally melancholy and despairing; and sometimes he gnashes his teeth, as if impatient of the weight of woes that oppresses him.

When my guest was a little recovered, I had great trouble to keep off the men, who wished to ask him a thousand questions; but I would not allow him to be tormented by their idle curiosity, in a state of body and mind whose restoration evidently depended upon entire repose. Once, however, the lieutenant asked, Why

he had come so far upon the ice in so strange a vehicle?

His countenance instantly assumed an aspect of the deepest gloom; and he replied, "To seek one who fled from me."

"And did the man whom you pursued travel in the same fashion?"

"Yes."

"Then I fancy we have seen him; for the day before we picked you up, we saw some dogs drawing a sledge, with a man in it, across the ice."

This aroused the stranger's attention; and he asked a multitude of questions concerning the route which the demon, as he called him, had pursued. Soon after, when he was alone with me, he said,—"I have, doubtless, excited your curiosity, as well as that of these good people; but you are too considerate to make inquiries."

"Certainly; it would indeed be very impertinent and inhuman in me to trouble you with any inquisitiveness of mine."

"And yet you rescued me from a strange and perilous situation; you have benevolently restored me to life."

Soon after this he inquired if I thought that the breaking up of the ice had destroyed the other sledge? I replied that I could not answer with any degree of certainty; for the ice had not broken until near midnight, and the traveller might have arrived at a place of safety before that time; but of this I could not judge.

From this time a new spirit of life animated the decaying frame of the stranger. He manifested the greatest eagerness to be upon deck, to watch for the sledge which had before appeared; but I have persuaded him to remain in the cabin, for he is far too weak to sustain the rawness of the atmosphere. I have promised that some one should watch for him, and give him instant notice if any new object should appear in sight.

Such is my journal of what relates to this strange occurrence up to the present day. The stranger has gradually improved in health, but is very silent, and appears uneasy when any one except myself enters his cabin. Yet his manners are so conciliating and gentle that the sailors are all interested in him, although they have had very little communication with him. For my own part, I begin to love him as a brother; and his constant and deep grief fills me with sympathy and compassion. He must have been a noble creature in his better days, being even now in wreck so attractive and amiable.

I said in one of my letters, my dear Margaret, that I should find no friend on the wide ocean; yet I have found a man whom, before his spirit had been broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother of my heart.

I shall continue my journal concerning the stranger at intervals, should I have any fresh incidents to record.

August 13th, 17—.

MY AFFECTION for my guest increases every day. He excites at once my admiration and my pity to an astonishing degree. How can I see so noble a creature destroyed by misery, without feeling the most poignant grief? He is so gentle, yet so wise; his mind is so cultivated; and when he speaks, although his words are culled with the choicest art, yet they flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence.

He is now much recovered from his illness, and is continually on the deck, apparently watching for the sledge that preceded his own. Yet, although unhappy, he is not so utterly occupied by his own misery but that he interests himself deeply in the projects of others. He has frequently conversed with me on mine, which I have communicated to him without disguise. He entered attentively into all my arguments in favor of my eventual success, and into every minute detail of the measures I had taken to secure it. I was

easily led by the sympathy which he evinced to use the language of my heart; to give utterance to the burning ardor of my soul; and to say, with all the fervor that warmed me, how gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my hope, to the furtherance of my enterprise. One man's life or death were but a small price to pay for the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought; for the dominion I should acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race.

As I spoke, a dark gloom spread over my listener's countenance. At first I perceived that he tried to suppress his emotion; he placed his hands before his eyes; and my voice quivered and failed me, as I beheld tears trickle fast from between his fingers—a groan burst from his heaving breast. I paused;—at length he spoke, in broken accents:—"Unhappy man! Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draft? Hear me—let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!"

Such words, you may imagine, strongly excited my curiosity; but the paroxysm of grief that had seized the stranger overcame his weakened powers, and many hours of repose and tranquil conversation were necessary to restore his composure.

Having conquered the violence of his feelings, he appeared to despise himself for being the slave of passion; and quelling the dark tyranny of despair, he led me again to converse concerning myself personally. He asked me the history of my earlier years. The tale was quickly told: but it awakened various trains of reflection. I spoke of my desire of finding a friend—of my thirst for a more intimate sympathy with a fellow mind than had ever fallen to my lot; and expressed my conviction that a man could boast of little happiness, who did not enjoy this blessing.

"I agree with you," replied the stranger; "we are unfashioned creatures, but half made up, if one wiser, better, dearer than ourselves—such a friend ought to be—do not lend his aid to perfectionate our weak and faulty natures. I once had a friend, the most noble of human creatures, and am entitled, therefore, to judge respecting friendship. You have hope, and the world before you, and have no cause for despair. But I—I have lost everything, and can not begin life anew."

As he said this, his countenance became expressive of a calm settled grief, that touched me to the heart. But he was silent, and presently retired to his cabin.

August 19th, 17—.

YESTERDAY the stranger said to me, "You may easily perceive, Captain Walton, that I have suffered great and unparalleled misfortunes. I had determined, at one time, that the memory of these evils should die with me; but you have won me to alter my determination. You seek for knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine has been. I do not know that the relation of my disasters will be useful to you; yet, when I reflect that you are pursuing the same course, exposing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me what I am, I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale; one that may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking, and console you in case of failure. Prepare to hear of occurrences which are usually deemed marvellous. Were we among the tamer scenes of nature, I might fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps your ridicule; but many things will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions which would provoke the laughter of those unacquainted with the ever-varied powers of nature:—nor can I doubt but that my tale conveys in its series internal evidence of

the truth of the events of which it is composed."

You may easily imagine that I was much gratified by the offered communication; yet I could not endure that he should renew his grief by a recital of his misfortunes. I felt the greatest eagerness to hear the promised narrative, partly from curiosity, and partly from a strong desire to ameliorate his fate, if it were in my power. I expressed these feelings in my answer.

"I thank you," he replied, "for your sympathy, but it is useless; my fate is nearly fulfilled. I wait but for one event, and then I shall repose in peace. I understand your feeling," continued he, perceiving that I wished to interrupt him; "but you are mistaken, my friend, if thus you will allow me to name you; nothing can alter my destiny: listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is determined."

He then told me that he would commence his narrative the next day when I should be at leisure. This promise drew from me the warmest thanks. I have resolved every night, when I am not imperatively occupied by my duties, to record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what he has related during the day. If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes. This manuscript will doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure; but to me, who know him, and who hear it from his own lips, with what interest and sympathy shall I read it in some future day! Even now, as I commence my task, his full-toned voice swells in my ears; his lustrous eyes dwell on me with all their melancholy sweetness; I see his thin hand raised in animation, while the lineaments of his face are irradiated by the soul within. Strange and harrowing must be his story; frightful the storm which embraced the gallant vessel on its course, and wrecked it—thus!

CHAPTER 1

I AM by birth a Genevese; and my family is one of the most distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years counsellors and syndics; and my father had filled several public situations with honor and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public business. He passed his younger days perpetually occupied by the affairs of his country; a variety of circumstances had prevented his marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a husband and the father of a family.

As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I can not refrain from relating them. One of his most intimate friends was a merchant, who, from a flourishing state, fell, through numerous mischances, into poverty. This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a proud and unbending disposition, and could not bear to live in poverty and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been distinguished for his rank and magnificence. Having paid his debts, therefore, in the most honorable manner, he retreated with his daughter to the town of Lucerne, where he lived unknown and in wretchedness. My father loved Beaufort with the truest friendship, and was deeply grieved by his retreat in these unfortunate circumstances. He bitterly deplored the false pride which led his friend to a conduct so little worthy of the affection that united them. He lost no time in endeavoring to seek him out, with the hope of persuading him to begin the world again through his credit and assistance.

Beaufort had taken effectual measures to conceal himself; and it was ten months before my father discovered his abode. Overjoyed at this discovery, he hastened to the house, which was situated in a mean street, near the Reuss. But when he en-

tered, misery and despair alone welcomed him. Beaufort had saved but a very small sum of money from the wreck of his fortunes; but it was sufficient to provide him with sustenance for some months, and in the meantime he hoped to procure some respectable employment in a merchant's house. The interval was, consequently, spent in inaction; his grief only became more deep and rankling when he had leisure for reflection; and at length it took so fast hold of his mind that at the end of three months he lay on a bed of sickness, incapable of any exertion.

His daughter attended him with the greatest tenderness; but she saw with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing, and that there was no other prospect of support. But Caroline Beaufort possessed a mind of an uncommon mold; and her courage rose to support her in her adversity. She procured plain work; she plaited straw; and by various means contrived to earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to support life.

Several months passed in this manner. Her father grew worse; her time was more entirely occupied in attending him; her means of subsistence decreased; and in the tenth month her father died in her arms, leaving her an orphan and a beggar. This last blow overcame her; and she knelt by Beaufort's coffin, weeping bitterly, when my father entered the chamber. He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who committed herself to his care; and after the interment of his friend, he conducted her to Geneva, and placed her under the protection of a relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.

There was a considerable difference between the ages of my parents, but this circumstance seemed to unite them only closer in bonds of devoted affection. There was a sense of justice in my father's upright mind, which rendered it necessary that he should approve highly to love strongly. There was a show of gratitude and worship in his attachment to my mother, differing wholly from the doting fondness of age, for it was inspired by reverence for her virtues, and a desire to be the means of, in some degree, recompensing her for the sorrows she had endured, but which gave inexpressible grace to his behavior to her. Everything was made to yield to her wishes and her convenience. He strove to shelter her, as a fair exotic is sheltered by the gardener, from every rougher wind, and to surround her with all that could tend to excite pleasurable emotion in her soft and benevolent mind. Her health, and even the tranquillity of her hitherto constant spirit, had been shaken by what she had gone through. During the two years that had elapsed previous to their marriage my father had gradually relinquished all his public functions; and immediately after their union they sought the pleasant climate of Italy, and the change of scene and interest attendant on a tour through that land of wonders, as a restorative for her weakened frame.

From Italy they visited Germany and France. I, their eldest child, was born in Naples, and as an infant accompanied them in their rambles. I remained for several years their only child. Much as they were attached to each other, they seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very mine of love to bestow them upon me. I was their plaything and their idol, and something better—their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled their duties towards me.

For a long time I was their only care. My mother had much desired to have a daughter, but I continued their single off-

spring. When I was about five years old, while making an excursion beyond the frontiers of Italy, they passed a week on the shores of the Lake of Como. Their benevolent disposition often made them enter the cottages of the poor. This, to my mother, was more than a duty; it was a necessity, a passion—remembering what she had suffered, and how she had been relieved—for her to act in her turn the guardian angel to the afflicted.

During one of their walks a poor cot in the foldings of a vale attracted their notice as being singularly disconsolate, while the number of half-clothed children gathered about it spoke of penury in its worst shape. One day, when my father had gone by himself to Milan, my mother, accompanied by me, visited this abode. She found a peasant and his wife, hard-working, bent down by care and labor, distributing a scanty meal to five hungry babes. Among these there was one which attracted my mother far above all the rest. She appeared of a different stock. The four others were dark-eyed, hardy little vagrants; this child was thin, and very fair. Her hair was the brightest living gold, and, despite the poverty of her clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the molding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness, that none could behold her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent, and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features.

The peasant woman, perceiving that my mother fixed eyes of wonder and admiration on this lovely girl, eagerly communicated her history. She was not her child, but the daughter of a Milanese nobleman. Her mother was a German, and had died on giving her birth. The infant had been placed with these good people to nurse: they were better off then. They had not been long married, and their eldest child was but just born. The father of their charge was one of those Italians nursed in the memory of the antique glory of Italy—one among the *schiavi ognor frementi,* who exerted himself to obtain the liberty of his country. He became the victim of its weakness. Whether he had died, or still lingered in the dungeons of Austria, was not known. His property was confiscated, his child became an orphan and a beggar. She continued with her foster parents, and bloomed in their rude abode, fairer than a garden rose among dark-leaved brambles.

When my father returned from Milan, he found playing with me in the hall of our villa a child fairer than pictured cherub—a creature who seemed to shed radiance from her looks, and whose form and motions were lighter than the chamois of the hills. The apparition was soon explained. With his permission my mother prevailed on her rustic guardians to yield their charge to her. They were fond of the sweet orphan. Her presence had seemed a blessing to them; but it would be unfair to her to keep her in poverty and want, when Providence afforded her such powerful protection. They consulted their village priest, and the result was that Elizabeth Lavenza became the inmate of my parents' house—my more than sister—the beautiful and adored companion of all my occupations and my pleasures.

Every one loved Elizabeth. The passionate and almost reverential attachment with which all regarded her became, while I shared it, my pride and my delight. On the evening previous to her being brought to my home, my mother had said playfully—"I have a pretty present for my Victor—tomorrow he shall have it." And when, on the morrow, she presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift, I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words

literally, and looked upon Elizabeth as mine—mine to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed on her, I received as made to a possession of my own. We called each other familiarly by the name of cousin. No word, no expression could body forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me—my more than sister, since till death she was to be mine only.

CHAPTER 2

WE WERE brought up together; there was not quite a year difference in our ages. Elizabeth was of a calmer and more concentrated disposition; but, with all my ardor, I was capable of a more intense application, and was more deeply smitten with the thirst for knowledge. She busied herself with following the aerial creations of the poets; and in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home—the sublime shapes of the mountains; the changes of the seasons; tempest and calm; the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of our Alpine summers—she found ample scope for admiration and delight. While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the magnificent appearance of things, I delighted in investigating their causes. The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine. Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature, gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the earliest sensations I can remember.

On the birth of a second son, my junior by seven years, my parents gave up entirely their wandering life, and fixed themselves in their native country. We possessed a house in Geneva, and a *campagne* on Belrive, the eastern shore of the lake, at the distance of rather more than a league from the city. We resided principally in the latter, and the lives of my parents were passed in considerable seclusion. It was my temper to avoid a crowd, and to attach myself fervently to a few. I was indifferent, therefore, to my schoolfellows in general; but I united myself in the bonds of the closest friendship to one among them. Henry Clerval was the son of a merchant of Geneva. He was a boy of singular talent and fancy. He loved enterprise, hardship, and even danger, for its own sake. He was deeply read in books of chivalry and romance. He composed heroic songs, and began to write many a tale of enchantment and knightly adventure. He tried to make us act plays, and to enter into masquerades, in which the characters were drawn from the heroes of Roncesvalles, of the Round Table of King Arthur, and the chivalrous train who shed their blood to redeem the holy sepulcher from the hands of the infidels.

No human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself. My parents were possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence. We felt that they were not the tyrants to rule our lot according to their caprice, but the agents and creators of all the many delights which we enjoyed. When I mingled with other families, I distinctly discerned how peculiarly fortunate my lot was, and gratitude assisted the development of filial love.

My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement; but by some law in my temperature they were turned, not towards childish pursuits, but to an eager desire to learn, and not to learn all things indiscriminately. I confess that neither the structure of languages, nor the code of governments, nor the politics of various states, possessed attractions for me. It was the secrets of heaven and earth that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of things, or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious

soul of man that occupied me, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical, or, in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world.

Meanwhile Clerval occupied himself, so to speak, with the moral relations of things. The busy stage of life, the virtues of heroes, and the actions of men, were his theme; and his hope and his dream was to become one among those whose names are recorded in story, as the gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species.

The saintly soul of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home. Her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us. She was the living spirit of love to soften and attract: I might have become sullen in my study, rough through the ardor of my nature, but that she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness.

I feel exquisite pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood, before misfortune had tainted my mind, and changed its bright visions of extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self. Besides, in drawing the picture of my early days, I also record those events which led, by insensible steps, to my after tale of misery: for when I would account to myself for the birth of that passion, which afterwards ruled my destiny, I find it arise, like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost forgotten sources; but, swelling as it proceeded, it became the torrent which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys.

Natural philosophy is the genius that has regulated my fate; I desire, therefore, in this narration, to state those facts which led to my predilection for that science. When I was thirteen years of age, we all went on a party of pleasure to the baths near Thonon: the inclemency of the weather obliged us to remain a day confined to the inn. In this house I chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate, and the wonderful facts which he relates, soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new light seemed to dawn upon my mind; and, bounding with joy, I communicated my discovery to my father. My father looked carelessly at the title page of my book, and said, "Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste your time upon this; it is sad trash."

If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, which possessed much greater powers than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while those of the former were real and practical; under such circumstances, I should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside, and have contented my imagination, warmed as it was, by returning with greater ardor to my former studies. It is even possible that the train of my ideas would never have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. But the cursory glance my father had taken of my volume by no means assured me that he was acquainted with its contents; and I continued to read with the greatest avidity.

When I returned home, my first care was to procure the whole works of this author, and afterwards of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus. I read and studied the wild fancies of these writers with delight; they appeared to me treasures known to few besides myself. I have described myself as always having been embued with a fervent longing to pen-

etrate the secrets of nature. In spite of the intense labor and wonderful discoveries of modern philosophers, I always came from my studies discontented and unsatisfied. Sir Isaac Newton is said to have avowed that he felt like a child picking up shells beside the great and unexplored ocean of truth. Those of his successors in each branch of natural philosophy with whom I was acquainted appeared, even to my boy's apprehensions, as tyros engaged in the same pursuit.

The untaught peasant beheld the elements around him, and was acquainted with their practical uses. The most learned philosopher knew little more. He had partially unveiled the face of nature, but her immortal lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery. He might dissect, anatomize, and give names; but, not to speak of a final cause, causes in their secondary and tertiary grades were utterly unknown to him. I had gazed upon the fortifications and impediments that seemed to keep human beings from entering the citadel of nature, and rashly and ignorantly I had repined.

But here were books, and here were men who had penetrated deeper and knew more. I took their work for all that they averred, and I became their disciple. It may appear strange that such should arise in the Eighteenth Century; but while I followed the routine of education in the schools of Geneva, I was, to a great degree, self-taught with regard to my favorite studies. My father was not scientific, and I was left to struggle with a child's blindness, added to a student's thirst for knowledge. Under the guidance of my new preceptors, I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life; but the latter soon obtained my undivided attention. Wealth was an inferior object; but what glory would attend the discovery, if I could banish disease from the human frame, and render man invulnerable to any but a violent death!

Nor were these my only visions. The raising of ghosts or devils was a promise liberally accorded by my favorite authors, the fulfilment of which I most eagerly sought; and if my incantations were always unsuccessful, I attributed the failure rather to my own inexperience and mistake than to a want of skill or fidelity in my instructors. And thus for a time I was occupied by exploded systems, mingling, like an unadept, a thousand contradictory theories, and floundering desperately in a very slough of multifarious knowledge, guided by an ardent imagination and childish reasoning, till an accident again changed the current of my ideas.

When I was about fifteen years old we had retired to our house near Belrive, when we witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm. It advanced from behind the mountains of Jura; and the thunder burst at once with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens. I remained, while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight. As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so soon as the dazzling light vanished the oak had disappeared, and nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribands of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed.

Before this I was not unacquainted with the more obvious laws of electricity. On this occasion a man of great research in natural philosophy was with us, and, excited by this catastrophe, he entered on the explanation of a theory which he had

formed on the subject of electricity and galvanization, which was at once new and astonishing to me. All that he said threw greatly into the shade Cornelius Agrippa, Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, the lords of my imagination; but by some fatality the overthrow of these men disinclined me to pursue my accustomed studies. It seemed to me as if nothing would or could ever be known. All that had so long engaged my attention suddenly grew despicable. By one of those caprices of the mind, which we are perhaps most subject to in early youth, I at once gave up my former occupation; set down natural history and all its progeny as a deformed and abortive creation; and entertained the greatest disdain for a would-be science, which could never even step within the threshold of real knowledge. In this mood of mind I betook myself to the mathematics, and the branches of study appertaining to that science, as being built upon secure foundations, and so worthy of my consideration.

Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments are we bound to prosperity or ruin. When I look back, it seems to me as if this almost miraculous change of inclination and will was the immediate suggestion of the guardian angel of my life—the last effort made by the spirit of preservation to avert the storm that was even then hanging in the stars, and ready to envelop me. Her victory was announced by an unusual tranquillity and gladness of soul, which followed the relinquishing of my ancient and latterly tormenting studies. It was thus that I was to be taught to associate evil with their prosecution, happiness with their disregard.

It was a strong effort of the spirit of good; but it was ineffectual. Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and terrible destruction.

CHAPTER 3

When I had attained the age of seventeen, my parents resolved that I should become a student at the university of Ingolstadt. I had hitherto attended the schools of Geneva; but my father thought it necessary, for the completion of my education, that I should be made acquainted with other customs than those of my native country. My departure was therefore fixed at an early date; but before the day resolved upon could arrive, the first misfortune of my life occurred—an omen, as it were, of my future misery.

Elizabeth had caught the scarlet fever; her illness was severe, and she was in the greatest danger. During her illness, many arguments had been urged to persuade my mother to refrain from attending upon her. She had, at first, yielded to our entreaties; but when she heard that the life of her favorite was menaced, she could no longer control her anxiety. She attended her sick bed—her watchful attentions triumphed over the malignity of the distemper—Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this imprudence were fatal to her preserver. On the third day my mother sickened; her fever was accompanied by the most alarming symptoms, and the looks of her medical attendants prognosticated the worst event. On her death-bed the fortitude and benignity of this best of women did not desert her. She joined the hands of Elizabeth and myself:—"My children," she said, "my firmest hopes of future happiness were placed on the prospect of your union. This expectation will now be the consolation of your father. Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to my younger children. Alas! I regret that I am taken from you; and, happy and beloved as I have been, is it not hard to quit you all? But these are not thoughts befitting me; I will endeavor to resign myself cheerfully,

to death, and will indulge a hope of meeting you in another world."

She died calmly; and her countenance expressed affection even in death. I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent by that most irreparable evil; the void that presents itself to the soul; and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance. It is so long before the mind can persuade itself that she, whom we saw every day, and whose very existence appeared a part of our own, can have departed for ever—that the brightness of a beloved eye can have been extinguished, and the sound of a voice so familiar, and dear to the ear, can be hushed, never more to be heard. Those are the reflections of the first days; but when the lapse of time proves the reality of the evil, then the actual bitterness of grief commences. Yet why should I describe a sorrow which all have felt, and must feel? The time at length arrives, when grief is rather an indulgence than a necessity; and the smile that plays upon the lips, although it may be deemed a sacrilege, is not banished. My mother was dead, but we had still duties which we ought to perform; we must continue our course with the rest, and learn to think ourselves fortunate, whilst one remains whom the spoiler has not seized.

My departure for Ingolstadt, which had been deferred by these events, was now again determined upon. I obtained from my father a respite of some weeks. It appeared to me sacrilege so soon to leave the repose, akin to death, of the house of mourning, and to rush into the thick of life. I was new to sorrow, but it did not the less alarm me. I was unwilling to quit the sight of those that remained to me; and, above all, I desired to see my sweet Elizabeth in some degree consoled.

She indeed veiled her grief, and strove to act the comforter to us all. She looked steadily on life and assumed its duties with courage and zeal. She devoted herself to those whom she had been taught to call her uncle and cousins. Never was she so enchanting as at this time when she recalled the sunshine of her smiles and spent them upon us. She forgot even her own regret in her endeavors to make us forget.

The day of my departure at length arrived. Clerval spent the last evening with us. He had endeavored to persuade his father to permit him to accompany me, and to become my fellow student; but in vain. His father was a narrow-minded trader, and saw idleness and ruin in the aspirations and ambitions of his son. Henry deeply felt the misfortune of being debarred from a liberal education. He said little; but when he spoke, I read in his kindling eye and in his animated glance a restrained but firm resolve not to be chained to the miserable details of commerce.

We sat late. We could not tear ourselves away from each other, nor persuade ourselves to say the word "Farewell!" It was said; and we retired under the pretense of seeking repose, each fancying that the other was deceived: but when at morning's dawn I descended to the carriage which was to convey me away, they were all there—my father again to bless me, Clerval to press my hand once more, my Elizabeth to renew her entreaties that I would write often, and to bestow the last feminine attentions on her playmate and friend.

I threw myself into the chaise that was to convey me away, and indulged in the most melancholy reflections. I, who had ever been surrounded by amiable companions, continually engaged in endeavoring to bestow mutual pleasure, I was now alone. In the university, whither I was going, I must form my own friends, and be my own protector. My life had hitherto been remarkably secluded and domes-

tic; and this had given me invincible repugnance to new countenances. I loved my brothers, Elizabeth, and Clerval; these were "old familiar faces;" but I believed myself totally unfitted for the company of strangers. Such were my reflections as I commenced my journey; but as I proceeded my spirits and hopes rose. I ardently desired the acquisition of knowledge. I had often, when at home, thought it hard to remain during my youth cooped up in one place, and had longed to enter the world, and take my station among other human beings. Now my desires were complied with, and it would, indeed, have been folly to repent.

I had sufficient leisure for these and many other reflections during my journey to Ingolstadt, which was long and fatiguing. At length the high white steeple of the town met my eyes. I alighted, and was conducted to my solitary apartment, to spend the evening as I pleased.

THE next morning I delivered my letters of introduction and paid a visit to some of the principal professors. Chance—or rather the evil influence, the Angel of Destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father's door—led me first to Monsieur Krempe, professor of natural philosophy. He was an uncouth man, but deeply embued in the secrets of his science. He asked me several questions concerning my progress in the different branches of science appertaining to natural philosophy. I replied carelessly; and, partly in contempt, mentioned the names of my alchemists as the principal authors I had studied. The professor stared: "Have you," he said, "really spent your time in studying such nonsense?"

I replied in the affirmative. "Every minute," continued Monsieur Krempe with warmth, "every instant that you have wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost. You have burdened your memory with exploded systems and useless names. Good God! in what desert land have you lived, where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies, which you have so greedily imbibed, are a thousand years old, and as musty as they are ancient? I little expected, in this enlightened and scientific age, to find a disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. My dear sir, you must begin your studies entirely anew."

So saying, he stepped aside, and wrote down a list of several books treating of natural philosophy, which he desired me to procure; and dismissed me, after mentioning that in the beginning of the following week he intended to commence a course of lectures upon natural philosophy in its general relations, and that Monsieur Waldman, fellow-professor, would lecture upon chemistry the alternate days that he omitted.

I returned home, not disappointed, for I have said that I had long considered those authors useless whom the professor reprobated; but I returned, not at all the more inclined to recur to these studies in any shape. Monsieur Krempe was a little squat man, with a gruff voice and a repulsive countenance; the teacher, therefore, did not prepossess me in favor of his pursuits. In rather a too philosophical and connected strain, perhaps, I have given an account of the conclusions I had come to concerning them in my early years. As a child, I had not been content with the results promised by the modern professors of natural science. With a confusion of ideas only to be accounted for by my extreme youth, and my want of a guide on such matters, I had retrod the steps of knowledge along the paths of time, and exchanged the discoveries of recent inquirers for the dreams of forgotten alchemists. Besides, I had a contempt for the

uses of modern natural philosophy. It was very different when the masters of the science sought immortality and power; such views, although futile, were grand: but now the scene was changed. The ambition of the inquirer seemed to limit itself to the annihilation of those visions on which my interest in science was chiefly founded. I was required to exchange chimeras of boundless grandeur for realities of little worth.

Such were my reflections during the first two or three days of my residence at Ingolstadt, which were chiefly spent in becoming acquainted with the localities, and the principal residents in my new abode. But as the ensuing week commenced, I thought of the information which Monsieur Krempe had given me concerning the lectures. And although I could not consent to go and hear that little conceited fellow deliver sentences out of a pulpit, I recollected what he had said of Monsieur Waldman, whom I had never seen, as he had hitherto been out of town.

PARTLY from curiosity, and partly from idleness, I went into the lecturing-room, which Monsieur Waldman entered shortly after. This professor was very unlike his colleague. He appeared about fifty years of age, but with an aspect expressive of the greatest benevolence; a few gray hairs covered his temple, but those at the back of his head were nearly black. His person was short, but remarkably erect; and his voice the sweetest I had ever heard. He began his lecture by a recapitulation of the history of chemistry, and the various improvements made by different men of learning, pronouncing with fervor the names of the most distinguished discoverers. He then took a cursory view of the present state of the science, and explained many of its elementary terms. After having made a few preparatory experiments, he concluded with a panegyric upon modern chemistry, the terms of which I shall never forget:—

"The ancient teachers of this science," said he, "promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals can not be transmuted, and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the heavens: they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers; they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows."

Such were the professor's words—rather let me say such the words of fate, enounced to destroy me. As he went on, I felt as if my soul were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were touched which formed the mechanism of my being: chord after chord was sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception, one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of Frankenstein—more, far more, while I achieve: treading in the steps already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.

I closed not my eyes that night. My internal being was in a state of insurrection and turmoil; I felt that order would thence arise, but I had no power to produce it. By degrees, after the morning's dawn, sleep came. I awoke, and my yesternight's thoughts were as a dream. There only remained a resolution to return to my ancient studies, and to devote

myself to a science for which I believed myself to possess a natural talent.

On the same day, I paid Monsieur Waldman a visit. His manners in private were even more mild and attractive than in public; for there was a certain dignity in his mien during his lecture, which in his own house was replaced by the greatest affability and kindness. I gave him pretty nearly the same account of my former pursuits as I had given to his fellow-professors. He heard with attention the little narration concerning my studies, and smiled at the names of Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus, but without the contempt that Monsieur Krempe had exhibited. He said that "these were men to whose indefatigable zeal modern philosophers were indebted for most of the foundations of their knowledge. They had left to us, as an easier task, to give new names, and arrange in connected classifications, the facts which they in a great degree had been the instruments of bringing to light. The labors of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind."

I listened to his statement, which was delivered without any presumption or affectation; and then added, that his lecture had removed my prejudices against modern chemists; I expressed myself in measured terms, with the modesty and deference due from a youth to his instructor, without letting escape (inexperience in life would have made me ashamed) any of the enthusiasm which stimulated my intended labors. I requested his advice concerning the books I ought to procure.

"I am happy," said Monsieur Waldman, "to have gained a disciple; and if your application equals your ability, I have no doubt of your success. Chemistry is that branch of natural philosophy in which the greatest improvements have been and may be made: it is on that account that I have made it my peculiar study; but at the same time I have not neglected the other branches of science. A man would make but a very sorry chemist if he attended to that department of human knowledge alone. If your wish is to become really a man of science, and not merely a petty experimentalist, I should advise you to apply to every branch of natural philosophy, including mathematics."

He then took me into his laboratory, and explained to me the uses of his various machines; instructing me as to what I ought to procure, and promising me the use of his own when I should have advanced far enough in the science not to derange their mechanism. He also gave me the list of books which I had requested; and I took my leave.

Thus ended a day memorable to me: it decided my future destiny.

CHAPTER 4

FROM this day natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry, in the most comprehensive sense of the term, became nearly my sole occupation. I read with ardor those works, so full of genius and discrimination, which modern inquirers have written on these subjects. I attended the lectures, and cultivated the acquaintance, of the men of science of the university; and I found even in Monsieur Krempe a great deal of sound sense and real information, combined, it is true, with a repulsive physiognomy and manners, but not on that account the less valuable. In Monsieur Waldman I found a true friend. His gentleness was never tinged by dogmatism; and his instructions were given with an air of frankness and good nature that banished every idea of pedantry. In a thousand ways he smoothed for me the path of knowledge, and made the most abstruse inquiries clear and facile to my apprehension. My appli-

cation was at first fluctuating and uncertain; it gained strength as I proceeded, and soon became so ardent and eager that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory.

As I applied so closely, it may be easily conceived that my progress was rapid. My ardor was indeed the astonishment of students, and my proficiency that of the masters. Professor Krempe often asked me, with a sly smile, how Cornelius Agrippa went on? whilst Monsieur Waldman expressed the most heartfelt exultation in my progress. Two years passed in this manner, during which I paid no visit to Geneva, but was engaged, heart and soul, in the pursuit of some discoveries which I hoped to make. None but those who have experienced them can conceive of the enticements of science. In other studies you go as far as others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder. A mind of moderate capacity, which closely pursues one study, must infallibly arrive at great proficiency in that study; and I, who continually sought the attainment of one object of pursuit, and was solely wrapt up in this, improved so rapidly that, at the end of two years, I made some discoveries in the improvement of some chemical instruments which procured me great esteem and admiration at the university. When I had arrived at this point, and had become as well acquainted with the theory and practise of natural philosophy as depended on the lessons of any of the professors at Ingolstadt, my residence there being no longer conducive to my improvement, I thought of returning to my friends and my native town, when an incident happened that protracted my stay.

One of the phenomena which had peculiarly attracted my attention was the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with life. Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed? It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our inquiries. I revolved these circumstances in my mind, and determined thenceforth to apply myself more particularly to those branches of natural philosophy which relate to physiology. Unless I had been animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm, my application to this study would have been irksome, and almost intolerable.

To examine the causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy: but this was not sufficient; I must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body. In my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors. I do not ever remember to have trembled at a tale of superstition, or to have feared the apparition of a spirit. Darkness had no effect upon my fancy; and a churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become food for the worm. Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of this decay, and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and charnel-houses. My attention was fixed upon every object the most insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain.

I paused, examining and analyzing all the minutiæ of causation, as exemplified in the change from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprized that among so many men of genius who had directed their inquiries towards the same science, I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret.

Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not more certainly shine in the heavens, than that which I now affirm is true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. After days and nights of incredible labor and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.

The astonishment which I had at first experienced on this discovery soon gave place to delight and rapture. After so much time spent in painful labor, to arrive at once at the summit of my desires was the most gratifying consummation of my toils. But this discovery was so great and overwhelming that all the steps by which I had been progressively led to it were obliterated, and I beheld only the result. What had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation of the world was now within my grasp. Not that, like a magic scene, it all opened upon me at once: the information I had obtained was of a nature rather to direct my endeavors so soon as I should point them towards the object of my search, than to exhibit that object already accomplished. I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead, and found a passage to life, aided only by one glimmering, and seemingly ineffectual, light.

I SEE by your eagerness, and the wonder and hope which your eyes express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with which I am acquainted; that can not be: listen patiently until the end of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was, to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of knowledge, and how much happier that man is who believes his native town to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature will allow.

When I found so astonishing a power placed within my hands, I hesitated a long time concerning the manner in which I should employ it. Although I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation, yet to prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of fibers, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable difficulty and labor. I doubted at first whether I should attempt the creation of a being like myself, or one of simpler organization; but my imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful as man. The materials at present within my command hardly appeared adequate to so arduous an undertaking; but I doubted not that I should ultimately succeed. I prepared myself for a multitude of reverses; my operations might be incessantly baffled, and at last my work be imperfect: yet, when I considered the improvement which every day takes place in science and mechanics, I was encouraged to hope my present attempts would at least lay the foundations of future success. Nor could I consider the magnitude and complexity of my plan as any argument of its impracticability.

It was with these feelings that I began

the creation of a human being. As the minuteness of the parts formed a great hinderance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature; that is to say, about eight feet in height, and proportionably large. After having formed this determination, and having spent some months in successfully collecting and arranging my materials, I began.

No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onward, like a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these reflections, I thought that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible) renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.

These thoughts supported my spirits, while I pursued my undertaking with unremitting ardor. My cheek had grown pale with study, and my person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the next day or the next hour might realize. One secret which I alone possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself; and the moon gazed on my midnight labors, while, with unrelaxed and breathless eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding-places. Who shall conceive the horrors of my secret toil, as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave, or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless clay? My limbs now tremble and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but then a resistless, and almost frantic, impulse urged me forward; I seemed to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. It was indeed but a passing trance that only made me feel with renewed acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had returned to my old habits.

I collected bones from charnel-houses; and disturbed with profane fingers the tremendous secrets of the human frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase, I kept my workshop of filthy creation: my eyeballs were starting from their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The dissecting-room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials; and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation, whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I brought my work near to a conclusion.

The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields bestow a more plentiful harvest, or the vines yield a more luxuriant vintage: but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had not seen for so long a time.

My father made no reproach in his letters, and only took notice of my silence by inquiring into my occupations more particularly than before. Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labors; but I did not watch the blossom or the expanding leaves—sights which before always yielded me supreme delight—so deeply was I engrossed in my occupation. The leaves of that year had withered before my work drew near to a close;

and now every day showed me more plainly how well I had succeeded. But my enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety, and I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other unwholesome trade, than an artist occupied by his favorite employment. Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow-creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime. Sometimes I grew alarmed at the wreck I perceived that I had become; the energy of my purpose alone sustained me: my labors would soon end, and I believed that exercise and amusement would then drive away incipient disease; and I promised myself both of these when my creation should be complete.

In next month's chapters of this story, Frankenstein's monster strikes at human life.

The Bishop Sees Through

By AUGUST W. DERLETH

A brief story of the house that was not there, and a strange warning

THE Bishop raised tired eyes to regard his secretary, and sank back in his chair with a faint sigh. "What is it to be tonight?" he asked.

The secretary looked up. "Your Grace has an engagement with the Count and Countess Ruthven-Margold. I have ordered the motor for Your Grace."

"Margold," murmured the Bishop. "That's the spiritualistic chap, isn't it?"

"Quite so, Your Grace."

"Always trying to see through the veil, isn't he? But a deuced pleasant sort of chap, at any rate."

"Quite so."

The Bishop stood up and permitted himself to yawn slightly. Then he stepped over to the window and peered outward. "Beastly night, too. I wonder . . ."

"Your Grace can not very well cancel the engagement," murmured the secretary. "Your Grace will remember that a previous engagement with Count Ruthven-Margold was canceled in similar circumstances."

The Bishop grunted ungraciously, and looked once more toward the window, listening to the wind drive the rain against the glass. Then he shrugged his shoulders and rang for his topcoat and hat.

"Very carefully, now, Harry," said His Grace, as he entered his car. "The roads will be very slippery in this weather, and I should not like anything to happen."

"Very good, Your Grace." The chauffeur turned slightly. "It is the first road to the right, is it not, sir?"

"Yes. We will follow along the coast. I think the new road has just been opened; that saves us quite a distance. Almost a half-hour, I daresay."

The Bishop sank back, snapped off the light, and looked out at the black landscape as the car crept slowly along. There was simply no making it out in the driving rain; His Grace hoped his chauffeur would not lose the way.

The Bishop must have fallen asleep, for the jolting of the car coming to a stop brought him suddenly to a vague sense that something had gone wrong. He gathered himself together and shot a hasty glance at the streaming window. The sound of the wind blowing devilishly hard came to him simultaneously with that of the chauffeur's voice through the speaking-tube.

"I am very sorry, Your Grace, but I think we are lost. I can't imagine how it happened, sir; I have been most careful. I am sure the road is familiar, but I should not like to take a chance."

The Bishop debated with himself a moment. Should he turn back and send up an excuse, or should he press on? "Is there a house near, Harry?"

"There seems to be one just off the road here, sir. I thought it best to stop when I saw the light. Should I go in and inquire, sir?"

His Grace pressed his face close to the window and looked out. Yes, there was certainly a house some distance off the road. Well lighted, too. And if his eyes did not deceive him in the blinding rain, there was a hedge around the estate. He turned back to the speaking-tube.

"I'll go myself, Harry."

"Very good, sir."

The chauffeur scrambled out of his seat and came around to the side of the car, jerking the door open and standing respectfully until His Grace had alighted. Then he handed the Bishop an opened umbrella. The Bishop murmured something and went cautiously forward.

He found his way into the grounds easily enough. There was no gate set between the hedges on either side of the stone walk, and the walk itself stood out clearly enough. It was not half so bad when you were out in the rain as when you were looking out of a car, reflected His Grace. He followed the stone walk through a large and shadowy lawn, heavily covered with shrubbery, and came presently to a quaint old portico dimly illuminated by the light that streamed from the windows on either side of the door leading on to it. The Bishop's eye lighted upon a heavy, old-fashioned knocker, and he reached up and tugged at it. With some satisfaction he heard the sound of the wooden knocks reverberate through the hall beyond the door and presently he heard the pattering footsteps of some one coming to answer. Very soon the door swung open, and His Grace found himself face to face with a bent old man, whose dress proclaimed him the butler.

"I beg your pardon," began the Bishop, "but I'm afraid I am lost on the road. I came up from the city in this frightful rain, and I'm afraid my chauffeur has left the coast road somewhere behind."

The butler nodded sympathetically and smiled as much as propriety permitted. "You are still on the coast road, Your Grace," said the old man, whose eye must have caught sight of the Bishop's collar despite the fact that his topcoat was carefully muffled about his throat.

"That is gratifying," said His Grace. "I am trying to get to the home of your neighbor, the Count Ruthven-Margold. The road is not altogether familiar to me, and I should not like to find myself lost again in this beastly rain. Do I go straight ahead?"

"Ordinarily, yes, sir. But there has been a rather severe landslide on the cliff, and part of the coast road has been carried into the sea. If you will take the first turn to your left, and follow the road directly, you will reach Count Margold's home all

right; it will be the second house on the road."

"Thank you, my man," said the Bishop. He fished around in his pockets and came out with a half-crown, which he tendered the butler with a gracious smile.

The butler touched his forehead and bowed. "Thank you, sir," he said. Then he entered the house and closed the door very softly behind him.

The Bishop came rapidly toward his motor. The chauffeur was waiting to take the umbrella. "There has been a landslide on the road ahead, Harry," said His Grace from the tonneau. "The second house on the first road to the left should be Count Ruthven-Margold's."

"Very good, sir."

THE second house on the road to the left was indeed that of the Count Ruthven-Margold. The count himself appeared in the doorway, summoned no doubt by the sound of the motor, and welcomed the Bishop with a loud "Hullo!" Behind him, the Bishop could see the countess.

"We thought you'd given up," said the count as His Grace stepped out of the car and came toward him.

"Almost missed you," said the Bishop, now very affable in the warmth of the hall. "We had to make a detour because of the landslide."

"Landslide!" exclaimed the count and countess together. "Where?"

"Along the coast road, of course," said His Grace, chafing his hands. "Surely you've heard of it."

The count looked at his wife, and the countess looked at the Bishop. "But there has been no landslide, Your Grace," said the countess.

"Then some one has been playing a trick on me. My chauffeur lost his bearings some way down the road, and the butler at the place where I asked about the road assured me that there had been a landslide. I was advised to take the first road to the left. At any rate his directions got me here."

"Where was the place you stopped at?" asked the count.

"I'm afraid I really can't say. I was lost at the time, you know. But it's not far from the road we turned in on. An old house—I should say sort of Georgian. With a hedge around the grounds."

The count looked puzzled. "Surely not Everett's place?" he asked his wife.

"Their butler left them only this morning," returned the countess, "and I know for a certainty that they've not yet got another in his place."

"And not Mackenzie's, that's certain."

"They've no hedge."

"Oh, well, it's certainly not important," said the count, dismissing the subject abruptly. "Come and sit down, Bishop."

A half-hour later the conversation had turned very naturally to Count Ruthven-Margold's hobby, and manifestations of the spiritual world were being very effectively damned by the Bishop, who made it clear that while his religion demanded his belief in the beyond, it made no provision for material manifestations such as ghosts and visions.

"It's a pretty thought," the Bishop was saying, "this seeing through the veil, but hardly tenable, I'm afraid."

Count Ruthven-Margold had just opened his lips to reply, when his attention was distracted by the sudden sharp skirling of the telephone bell. The count reached out and took up the monophone. Then for a few moments he spoke and listened, while the Bishop and his hostess kept silent.

"Why, that's a funny thing," said the count, turning away from the instrument. "The commissioner just called from the city to tell me that there has been a landslide on the coast road just below my

(Please turn to page 719)

Coming Next Month

AS MASON, shuddering at his own imaginings, moved down the stairs toward what should be the kitchen of the house, he sensed the odor of decomposing animal matter. The stench of wild beasts' bodies in a closed, unaired place grew overpowering, sickening. Step by step, he moved down the staircase, the torch turned off so as not to apprise any one below, if indeed anybody waited in ambush there, of his coming. But upon reaching the lower step, he flashed the light quickly about.

The kitchen was empty, but the door from it into the back room was open, and Egyptian darkness gloomed ahead. He sprang across the kitchen, automatic in readiness, and illuminated the parlor. It also was empty. Empty? . . . As he looked about, his nostrils contracted against the fetid smell of decay, and his eyes went roving in search of the cause.

The floor was of bare boards; there were no chairs or other furniture in either of the two rooms. But here and there on the bare boards were—things—that Mason turned the light on, shuddering as he looked. There were black stains here and there. . . . There were bits of decaying furry skin. . . . And there were little piles of gnawed white bones. . . . And almost at his feet lay a crumpled bit of material. . . . He leaned down and turned it over. Good God! There had been the taxi-driver's missing child . . . and that material was . . . a child's stained, torn little rompers. . . .

Mason groaned aloud involuntarily. Then he became keenly aware of what the pervading odor conveyed. It was the unforgettable stench of wild beasts' kennels in the public zoos. It was unbearable, sickening, disgusting. Nausea got the better of him. He went back through the kitchen, avoiding with inward shrinking those dark stains on the wide boards, and leaped up the staircase with the disagreeable feeling that some one behind him would presently lay a chilling hand on his shoulder, or pull at his ankles. Just as he opened the communicating door, he caught the sound of padding feet and clicking nails upon the flagstone terrace outside the house. . . .

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June WEIRD TALES Out May 1

The Eyrie

(Continued from page 582)

ing but instructive. I spent much time in walking the floor waiting for the next copy of WEIRD TALES while reading it. Here's success to you, and through your magazine to these so interesting writers, all of them. And especially more stories by Clark Ashton Smith and Otis Adelbert Kline."

We have just about enough space for a knock which comes to the Eyrie from B. L. Mengshoel, of Minneapolis. "What in the world," writes Mr. Mengshoel, "makes that otherwise brilliant orientalist Otis Adelbert Kline queer his talent by hasping off such mythological rot as that *Tam, Son of the Tiger,* otherwise a worthy brother to that insane Tarzan tale by one Burroughs? Even that childish *Jungle Book* by Kipling ranks higher as fiction. At least that author does not try to blow life into the Brahman gods and goddesses to create extraordinary, unearthly and impossible characters for the diversion of uncultured imagination. And as to Hamilton s stories, I simply can not make myself read them through—no more than I would have patience to listen to a long harangue by some *soi-disant* scientist-adventurer escaped from an asylum for locos. Why in the world can not such great talents occupy themselves with our own planet and among beings that at least are possible and plausible? There is plenty of mysticism and weirdness in our earthly surroundings and atmosphere without the necessity of hunting for it through space or in worm-eaten old pagan beliefs."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The second installment of Seabury Quinn's novel, *The Devil's Bride,* was the most popular story in the March issue, and Kirk Mashburn's vampire tale, *The Vengeance of Ixmal,* was tied for second place with Harold Ward's strange story of resurrected corpses, *The House of the Living Dead.*

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The Bishop Sees Through

(Continued from page 716)

place. It happened about a half-hour ago, and he warned us not to use the road."

For a moment the Bishop looked startled. "That must be an error," he said at last. "A half-hour ago I was just driving up before this house."

The count shook his head. "They timed it pretty accurately; some people traveling this way just missed being swamped by it, and they called him almost immediately. Perhaps there is some variation in minutes either way, but at any event the thing happened after you were told of it by that butler."

"Perhaps the butler knew the road to be unsafe and warned me in time." The Bishop felt that his defense was indeed very feeble.

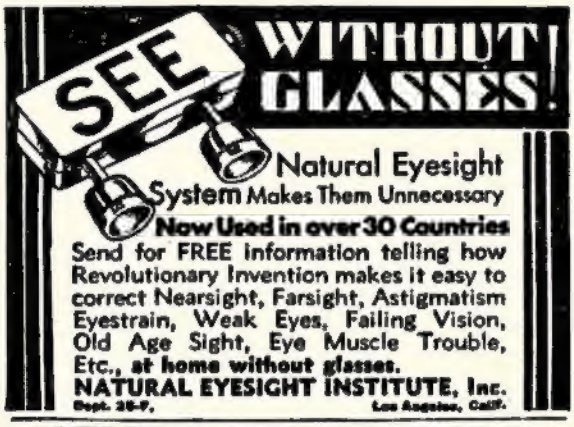
"I prefer to believe that a curious case of second sight," said the count.

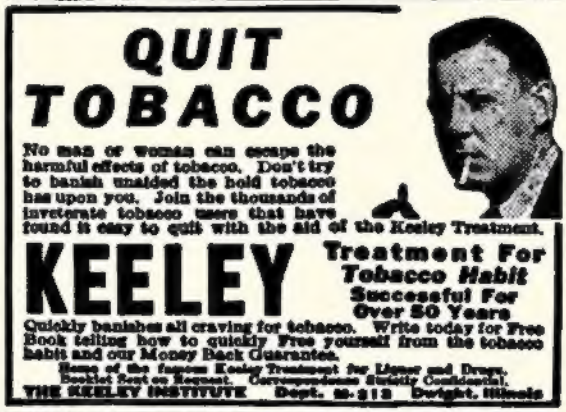
The Bishop smiled and shook his head. "Nonsense. There is an explanation lurking somewhere."

"You are devilish skeptical, aren't you, Bishop?" said the countess, laughing.

"See here," said His Grace, slightly irritated, "I'll drop in on the fellow on my way home tonight and ask him how he knew; I fancy that will settle the matter. Besides, I have him to thank for saving my life, if there's anything in what you say—and mind, I'm not flatly denying your view, my dear count."

THE Bishop left at last, and before he got into his car, instructed his chauffeur carefully in regard to the house near the road leading to the left from the coast road. There was to be no missing it, and the chauffeur, with a slight grimace, as-





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NEXT MONTH

The Siren of the Snakes

By ARLTON EADIE

FROM the dark forest there emerged an ever-increasing multitude of creeping things—huge pythons, hooded cobras, slender whip-snakes, deadly puff-adders — every poisonous and loathsome thing that crawls was there —all forming one wave of hideous gliding death—all converging to the path which led up to the fort.

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sured His Grace that the house would not be missed.

But when the car came to a stop and the Bishop leaned forward to peer into the darkness, there came once more the complaining voice of his chauffeur. The Bishop sighed.

"I simply can't understand what's the matter with me tonight, sir, but really, sir, I can not find that house. Here's approximately the place, sir, but that's surely not a house in there."

His Grace looked into the darkness. "Well, it's something," he said, "and it's worth trying for, at any rate. The umbrella, Harry."

"Very good, sir."

The Bishop picked his way through the mud at the side of the road, through a small ditch, and found himself suddenly on a stone walk that looked vaguely familiar. There was what had once been a hedge around the place, and the Bishop felt vaguely that there was some similarity between this place and that other. Not the place, apparently, but perhaps these people could help. He went on.

The rain beat furiously at him, and the wind threatened to tear his umbrella from his hands and send it far out into the sea, but the Bishop pressed on. His Grace came suddenly upon a stoop, and then found himself in what he took to be a portico. He looked up expectantly, and then stood thunderstruck. What he had taken for a house was not one at all; it was the ruins of what had once been an old Georgian house. The Bishop stared at the stark walls for a moment, and then his eyes caught the glint of something on the stone floor before him—just where the door should have been, he reflected. He bent closer to peer at it.

It was a half-crown, and it was a new coin, like those others that reposed in the Bishop's pocket.

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